Black Public Creative Figures in the Neo-Racial Moment: An Analysis of Tyra Banks, Tyler Perry and Shonda Rhimes, 2005-2010

Danielle E. Williams

Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_diss

Recommended Citation
http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_diss/39

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Communication at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry negotiate blackness in terms of racial representation both in their interactions with the press and public as well as in their final product. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are among the few prominent African American executive producers working in an industry of inequality. Each is the creative figure behind a prominent prime-time television show. This project contributes to the discussion of race and representation in the field of television studies.

I argue there is a connection between how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry publicly discuss race and how these perspectives are encoded in America’s Next Top Model (Banks), Grey’s Anatomy (Rhimes), and House of Payne (Perry) from 2005-2010. These three are vital case studies because their shows offer a range of African American representations and extra-textual discourses about representations.
Chapter Two historically contextualizes the industrial shifts in mainstream broadcast networks and basic cable channels as it relates to blackness onscreen and diversity behind the scenes. ABC, The CW, and TBS are the focus of this chapter because they are the outlets for Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s shows. I also position ABC, The CW, and TBS in relation to the rest of the industry as it has moved from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era. Chapter Three examines how Banks, Perry and Rhimes promote and publicize themselves as the key creative figure of their shows. This analysis places each individual in different sites of the burden of representation, which each handles differently. Chapter Four explores the connection between the role blackness plays in their image as public creative figure and how it is represented in their texts through a representational analysis of America’s Next Top Model, Grey’s Anatomy and House of Payne.

This dissertation advocates a neo-racial framework to examine blackness on television and behind the scenes. A neo-racial framework acknowledges that racial inequities continue to exist and the context surrounding these inequities needs to be examined. I conclude that the Banks, Rhimes, and Perry cases show that we are not in a post-racial society or in the post-network era.

INDEX WORDS: Assimilationist, Blackness and television, Neo-racial, Multiculturalist, Grey’s Anatomy, House of Payne, America’s Next Top Model
ASSIMILATIONIST PREVALENCE IN A NEO-RACIAL AGE: AN ANALYSIS OF TYRA BANKS, TYLER PERRY AND SHONDA RHIMES

by

DANIELLE E. WILLIAMS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012
ASSIMILATIONIST PREVALENCE IN A NEO-RACIAL AGE: AN ANALYSIS OF TYRA BANKS, TYLER PERRY AND SHONDA RHIMES

by

DANIELLE E. WILLIAMS

Committee Chair: Alisa Perren
Committee: Kathy Fuller-Seeley
Ted Friedman
Greg Smith
Jennifer Esposito

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
December 2012
DEDICATION

To my parents, Patricia and Earle F. Williams
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Alisa Perren for her guidance and direction on this project. Before coming to GSU, I was just a TV fan; now I am a television scholar. I enjoyed our meetings at Figo, and we made it through 2012! I also want to thank Dr. Kathy Fuller-Seeley for her constant support, encouragement, and friendship. Special thanks to the rest of my committee Drs. Friedman, Smith, and Esposito for their meticulous input on this project.

It takes a village to help a graduate student complete a dissertation. I could not have finished this project without the fellowship, friendship, and support from faculty and staff at Georgia State University, Kennesaw State University, and Auburn University. From GSU, I want to thank Stacy, Eric, Ms. Seeley, Tawanna, Marilyn, Gary, and Sekai. I am also thankful to Dr. Shane Toepfer for his friendship and much needed games of Monopoly. At KSU, I am especially grateful to Drs. Stephen Braden and Keisha Hoernner for allowing me to be a part of the Department of First-Year Programs. I most definitely could not have finished this dissertation without my KSU cheerleaders who constantly gave me encouragement, friendship, and food: Dee, Robin, Helen, Cathy, Kat, Jim, Kathy, Chuck, Jeannine, Lauren, and Ken. From my alma mater, Drs. Mary Helen Brown and Dave Sutton provided their continued support and camaraderie after I left the loveliest village on the plains. Thanks to Silas F. Zee for being my friend and giving me his rancor monster. Special thanks go to Dr. Emmett Winn for his friendship, kind words, and constant encouragement throughout this project and for seeing the potential in me all those years ago.

A very special, awesome, and cool thanks goes to Dr. Bryce McNeil, the “sixth” member of my committee and the best dissertation coach ever. I could not have completed this without
your friendship, encouragement, and numerous readings of drafts. I am indebted to Nick Johns for being the best cruise director in the Midwest and friend. Hanging out with you in South Dakota every summer provided me with the breaks I needed from this dissertation to finish it. Thanks for all the salt, cake, tacos, so much glitter, and saving me from the bats!

    I have to give so many thank yous to Scott Balzer for his love, friendship, support, and cups of coffee for the past ten years. I know I have not been the easiest person to deal or live with during this dissertation. I am grateful that you are in my life and have been part of this journey. I am very excited and looking forward to our new adventures!

    Special thanks to my grandfather, Donald Feuerborn, for his support and encouragement. I also want to thank June, for being a great second mom, doctor, and friend. I am so happy you are part of my family.

    Lastly, I want to thank my parents Patricia and Earle F. Williams for being the best two parents one could ever ask for and for continuously supporting my education. To my mom, thank you so much for your love, support, and confidence that I would finish this. I wish you were here to see it. To my dad, thank you for your love and support and for being my rock. I am so glad that you saw me first.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... v

1 BLACK PUBLIC CREATIVE FIGURES IN THE NEO-RACIAL MOMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF TYRA BANKS, TYLER PERRY AND SHONDA RHIMES, 2005-2010 .......... 1

1.1 Overview .......................................................................................................................... 1

1.2 Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1

1.2.1 Textual Descriptions ................................................................................................. 2

1.3 Why Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry? ...................................................... 6

1.3.1 Background .............................................................................................................. 8

1.3.2 Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as Creators and Executive Producers ............................... 8

1.4 Blackness in the Media ................................................................................................. 11

1.5 Industrial Context ........................................................................................................... 12

1.6 The Cosby Moment (1984-2005) ............................................................................... 16

1.6.1 End of the Cosby Moment .................................................................................... 16

1.7 The Neo-Cosby Moment (2005- ) ............................................................................ 24

1.8 Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as Star Producers/Public Creative Figures ......................... 26

1.9 Examining Race ............................................................................................................. 28

1.9.1 Racial Representations in the Text ........................................................................ 33

1.10 Significance of Project ................................................................................................. 45

1.11 Research Methodology ............................................................................................... 46

1.12 Chapter Outline ........................................................................................................... 52
# 2 DIVERSITY IN THE POST-NETWORK ERA

2.1 Introduction ................................................................. 57

2.1.1 The Decline of the Cosby Era (2000-2004) ........................................... 57

2.1.2 The Neo-Cosby Moment (2005-). ...................................................... 62

2.2 Industrial Shifts on ABC, The CW, and TBS from 2005-2010 ........................................... 68

2.2.1 ABC .................................................................................. 68

2.2.2 The CW ............................................................................. 80

2.2.3 TBS .................................................................................. 94

2.2.4 Broadcast Networks, Basic Cable, or just Television? ................................. 94

2.3 Diversity in the Neo-Cosby Moment ......................................................... 111

2.4 Conclusion: The Neo-Cosby Moment in the Multichannel Transition ............... 114

# 3 THE POWER OF THE PUBLIC CREATIVE FIGURE AND THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

3.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 117

3.1.1 Public Creative Figures & the Neo-Cosby Moment .................................... 117

3.1.2 Public Creative Figures & Control ......................................................... 120

3.1.3 Public Creative Figure and Race .......................................................... 121

3.2 Tyler Perry ................................................................. 126

3.2.1 He who has the gold makes the rules: Tyler Perry Presents “The Tyler Perry Way” .... 128

3.2.2 Tyler Perry- Black Power ................................................................. 128

3.2.3 A Message from Tyler Perry .............................................................. 134

3.3 Tyra Banks ......................................................... 136
3.3.1 From Supermodel to Super Mogul ......................................................... 140
3.3.2 Tyra Banks- Racial Responsibility .......................................................... 144
3.3.3 Tyra’s Twitter Fam ............................................................................. 147

3.4 Shonda Rhimes .................................................................................. 147
3.4.1 Shonda Who? ................................................................................ 152
3.4.2 Shonda Rhimes- Colorblind Queen ...................................................... 152
3.4.3 Shonda Rhimes: GA PCF or Fan? ......................................................... 160

3.5 Post-Racial or Neo-Racial? ................................................................. 163

3.6 Black Public Creative Figures vs. White Public Creative Figures .................. 167

3.7 Conclusion ...................................................................................... 170

4 BLACKNESS IN THE TEXT: A REPRESENTATIONAL ANALYSIS OF GREY’S
ANATOMY, HOUSE OF PAYNE, AND AMERICA’S NEXT TOP MODEL .............. 172

4.1 Introduction ..................................................................................... 172

4.2 Examining Representations of Blackness on Television ............................. 178

4.3 Textual Descriptions ......................................................................... 182

4.4 Blackness on Grey’s Anatomy ............................................................... 183

4.5 Blackness on House of Payne ............................................................... 207

4.6 Blackness on America’s Next Top Model ............................................... 222

4.7 Conclusion ..................................................................................... 243
5 CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................................. 246

5.1 Epilogue: Developments Since 2010 ....................................................................................... 251

5.2 Limitations of Study ............................................................................................................... 255

5.3 Future Areas of Research .................................................................................................... 257

5.4 Final Remarks ....................................................................................................................... 260

WORKS CITED ..................................................................................................................................... 261
1 BLACK PUBLIC CREATIVE FIGURES IN THE NEO-RACIAL MOMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF TYRA BANKS, TYLER PERRY AND SHONDA RHIMES, 2005-2010

1.1 Overview

In television studies, NBC’s The Cosby Show revolutionized representations of blackness onscreen and behind the scenes. Herman Gray (1995) identified these aesthetic and industrial changes as the “Cosby Moment.” This dissertation project contributes to the discussion of race and representation of blackness in television by identifying a new moment: the Neo-Cosby Moment (2005- ). I examine three key figures in during the first five years (2005-2010) of the Neo-Cosby Moment: Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry.

In this dissertation, I examine the industrial context, discourse surrounding Banks, Rhimes, and Perry, and the shows they created to explore the intersections of race and representation in the Neo-Cosby Moment. Industrially, they are among the few prominent African American executive producers working in an industry of inequality. Their success has also resulted in them having a greater media presence as public creative figures for America’s Next Top Model (Banks), Grey’s Anatomy (Rhimes), and House of Payne (Perry). These three are vital case studies because their shows offer a range of African American representations and extra-textual discourses about representations. Also in this dissertation I provide a new lens for examining blackness. I argue that a neo-racial framework provides a better approach for examining blackness on television and behind the scenes. In this project, I examine how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry publicly discuss race and how these perspectives are encoded in their shows as well as exploring why racial inequities continue to exist by examining the industrial shifts surrounding these inequities. A neo-racial lens provides insight into the complexities of the politics of race on-screen and behind the scenes in the Neo-Cosby Moment.
1.2 Introduction

Two current myths in our society in regards to race are that we live in a colorblind or post-racial society. We are perceived to be a colorblind society because race supposedly does not factor into someone’s chance of succeeding. Those supporting the idea of a post-racial society believe race does not matter. Television is often cited as an example of the “progress” our society has made in terms of race. Media critics point to multiracial ensemble dramas and reality shows such as Grey’s Anatomy (2005-) and America’s Next Top Model (2003-) as evidence of a diverse TV landscape and colorblind society (Gillespie 2006; Kaufman 2007; Armstrong and Watson 2008). On basic cable, Tyler Perry’s House of Payne (2007-2012) and Meet the Browns (2009-2011) are praised for making TBS “the home of minority-driven comedy” (Angelo 2010).

House of Payne (HOP), Grey’s Anatomy (GA), and America’s Next Top Model (ANTM) are popular programs for TBS, ABC, and The CW respectively, and have been for several years. In May 2010, over 15 million viewers turned in for the sixth season finale of GA. It is currently the number one program for adults 18-49 on Thursday evenings.\(^1\) HOP is a popular cable sitcom for adults 18-49. For TBS, HOP is one of the highest-rated basic cable sitcoms, generating between 1.5-2 million viewers an episode.\(^2\) Meanwhile, ANTM is one of The CW’s most popular shows. The show does well with adults 18-49, but its biggest demographic is women 18-34. The cycle 15 finale in May 2010 brought in 3.1 million viewers.\(^3\) Currently, ANTM is that network’s second most popular show, behind Vampire Diaries (2009-).\(^4\)

---


Yet diversity behind the scenes remains problematic. According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), “African Americans and other races are underrepresented in almost every aspect of the television … industry and have, for the most part, been denied access to any real positions of power in Hollywood.”\(^5\) The Writers Guild of America (WGA) states that as of 2009, “white males continue to dominate in both the film and television sectors.”\(^6\) Black writers make up 4.2% of the membership of the WGA though they are 13.1% of the U.S. population.\(^7\) In the 2007-2008 television season, only 7.1% of the executive producers, 6.4% of the co-executive producers, and 27.3% of staff writers were minorities.\(^8\) African Americans make up only a portion of these small figures.\(^9\)

The absence of African Americans in key positions behind-the-scenes translates to the lack of diverse representations of African Americans onscreen. For decades, the \textit{black-oriented sitcom}- which is defined as a program with a predominantly African American cast or an African American leading character- has been a prevalent source for African American representation.


\(^{7}\) The WGA found that number of black writers decreased 15.8% from 2003-2007. ''USA Quick Facts”, United States Census Bureau (accessed September 11, 2012 2012).

\(^{8}\) The WGA classifies African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans as minorities. For more information see WGA.

\(^{9}\) In the statistics provided, African Americans are only a portion of that small figure which also includes Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans.
onscreen. It also has been the primary program form for African Americans working in Hollywood television production. As of this writing, there are zero black-oriented programs on broadcast network prime-time television. However, Tyler Perry’s House of Payne (HOP), a black-oriented sitcom, thrives on TBS, a general audience basic cable network. Examining HOP is important because it is one of the few black-oriented sitcoms on television. A black-oriented show is different from a black-featured show in which African Americans are part of the cast but have a minor or supporting role. America’s Next Top Model and Grey’s Anatomy, in contrast, are black-featured shows.

This project uses Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry as case studies; they are three of the most successful African American executive producers of the 2000s. They are among the few prominent African American executive producers working in an industry in which things are not equal. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are creators and executive producers of America’s Next Top Model, Grey’s Anatomy and House of Payne respectively. This dissertation examines how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry negotiate blackness in terms of racial representation both in their interactions with the press and public as well as through their final product from 2005-2010. This project contributes to the discussion of race and representation in the field of television studies.

11 I am examining prime-time representations of blackness on network and general audience basic cable networks from 2005-2010. As of December 2010, there were three black-oriented sitcoms on TBS (House of Payne, Meet the Browns, and Are We There Yet?. BET and TV One launched their black-oriented sitcoms in 2011.
12 I came up with this term as a way to differentiate programs that do not fall into the black-oriented program category. Although Tyra Banks is the host/judge of America’s Next Top Model, the focus of the show is on the contestants, which is why I classify it as black-featured and not black-oriented.
13 The official title is Tyler Perry’s House of Payne. I have shortened it to House of Payne (HOP).
1.2.1 Textual Descriptions

In Perry’s *House of Payne*, the Paynes are a multigenerational blue-collar African American family living in Atlanta. Curtis, head of the Payne family, is a fire chief. His nephew, C.J., is a lieutenant at the station, and his son, Calvin, is a volunteer fireman. Perry said he made the Payne men firemen because he wanted to be a fireman when he was a child. Ella, the family matriarch, is a stay-at-home wife and mother. C.J., his wife Janine, and their two children (Malik and Jazmine) move in with Curtis and Ella after their house burns down. The Paynes also discover that Janine is addicted to crack and is responsible for the house fire. The series focuses on the entire Payne family living under the same roof with storylines dealing with major issues such as Janine’s addiction and recovery as well as minor concerns such as Jazmine competing in a spelling bee or Malik liking a girl in his class.

*Grey’s Anatomy* (*GA*), one of the top-rated shows on broadcast network television, is a medical drama focusing on the interactions between interns, residents, and attending doctors at Seattle Grace Hospital. Rhimes consciously created a multiracial universe at Seattle Grace Hospital on *GA*. *GA* is a black-featured show, as opposed to a black-oriented show, because there are African American actors in minor or supporting roles. As of 2010, the chief of surgery (Dr. Webber), an attending general surgeon (Dr. Bailey), and an intern (Dr. Avery) are African American. Although the show has a diverse ensemble cast, the primary focus is Dr. Meredith Grey and her on-again-off-again romance with Dr. Shepherd, who are both white.

*America’s Next Top Model* (*ANTM*) is a reality show in which twelve aspiring models compete for the title of “America’s Next Top Model.” Tyra Banks, creator, executive producer, and host, designed the show to mirror similar experiences she had on her journey to becoming a
Each week, contestants learn the elements of the modeling industry and participate in photo shoots, which are used by the judges to eliminate a contestant. The judging panel consists of Banks, former model-turned-photographer Nigel Barker, and assorted industry “experts” such as Janice Dickinson, Twiggy, Paulina Porizkova, and Kimora Lee Simmons. On the show, Banks regularly addresses the challenges models of color face in the industry and how to handle these situations. The show presents a mixture of aspiring models that range in age, size, nationality, and race. In the first thirteen cycles, there have been five African American "Top Models" and numerous African American contestants.

1.3 Why Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry?

In Perry’s House of Payne, the Paynes are a multigenerational blue-collar African American family living in Atlanta. Curtis, head of the Payne family, is a fire chief. His nephew, C.J., is a lieutenant at the station, and his son, Calvin, is a volunteer fireman. Perry said he made the Payne men firemen because he wanted to be a fireman when he was a child. Ella, the family matriarch, is a stay-at-home wife and mother. C.J., his wife Janine, and their two children (Malik and Jazmine) move in with Curtis and Ella after their house burns down. The Paynes also discover that Janine is addicted to crack and is responsible for the house fire. The series focuses on the entire Payne family living under the same roof with storylines dealing with major issues such as...
as Janine’s addiction and recovery as well as minor concerns such as Jazmine competing in a spelling bee or Malik liking a girl in his class.

*Grey’s Anatomy* (GA), one of the top-rated shows on broadcast network television, is a medical drama focusing on the interactions between interns, residents, and attending doctors at Seattle Grace Hospital. Rhimes consciously created a multiracial universe at Seattle Grace Hospital on *GA*. *GA* is a black-featured show, as opposed to a black-oriented show, because there are African American actors in minor or supporting roles. As of 2010, the chief of surgery (Dr. Webber), an attending general surgeon (Dr. Bailey), and an intern (Dr. Avery) are African American. Although the show has a diverse ensemble cast, the primary focus is Dr. Meredith Grey and her on-again-off-again romance with Dr. Shepherd, who are both white.

*America’s Next Top Model (ANTM)* is a reality show in which twelve aspiring models compete for the title of “America’s Next Top Model.” Tyra Banks, creator, executive producer, and host, designed the show to mirror similar experiences she had on her journey to becoming a supermodel. Each week, contestants learn the elements of the modeling industry and participate in photo shoots, which are used by the judges to eliminate a contestant. The judging panel consists of Banks, former model-turned-photographer Nigel Barker, and assorted industry “experts” such as Janice Dickinson, Twiggy, Paulina Porizkova, and Kimora Lee Simmons. On the show, Banks regularly addresses the challenges models of color face in the industry and how to handle these situations. The show presents a mixture of aspiring models that range in age,

---


18 Banks is the only judge that has been on *ANTM* since the first cycle. Nigel Barker started in cycle 2. In the first cycle, Banks had supermodels Janice Dickinson and Kimora Lee Simmons and fashion editor and stylist Beau Quillian. From cycles 1-12, the judges consisted of four full-time judges and a rotating guest judge. Dickinson worked as a judge until season 4. Fashion icon Twiggy replaced Dickinson and judged on cycles 5-9. Model Paulina Porizkova replaced Twiggy and worked on cycles 10-12. Porizkova has been replaced with weekly celebrity guest judges.
size, nationality, and race. In the first thirteen cycles, there have been five African American "Top Models" and numerous African American contestants.  

1.3.1 Background

Tyra Banks started as a model. She broke color barriers in the world of modeling when she became the first African American model to have a solo picture on the covers of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue (1996) and the *Victoria’s Secret* catalog (1997). Although Banks had a successful modeling career, she was inspired by supermodel Cindy Crawford’s successful transition from model to media icon: "There's never been a Black model with that kind of mass appeal and I wanted to be like that." Banks also had an interest in television. She was accepted into Loyola Marymount University’s film and television program but decided to actively pursue modeling instead (Lisotta 2005).

Banks used her experience and notoriety as a model to create *America’s Next Top Model*. She wanted to show the realities of modeling such as stressful fashion shoots and runway shows as well as the “retouching, styling, and makeup tricks they [the modeling industry] use to make models look perfect.” Banks serves as the show’s executive producer and host. Banks is “America’s Top Model” and she wants the model-contestants to follow in her footsteps. The weekly photo shoots are often modeled after signature photos from Banks’s career (Richmond 2008). Moreover, the model-contestants live together in a house, which contains pictures of Banks that function as a template for the hopeful models. Banks teamed up with producer Ken

---

19 There have been seven models of color awarded the title of “America’s Next Top Model.” The five African American winners are Eva Pigford (cycle 3), Danielle Evans (cycle 6), Saleisha Stowers (cycle 9), Teyona Anderson (cycle 12), and Krista White (cycle 14). Cycle 4 winner Naima Mora described herself as multiracial on *ANTM*. Jaslene Gonzalez (cycle 8) is the first and only Hispanic winner. Collier, 158.

Mok to get *ANTM* on the air. In 2003, *ANTM* premiered on UPN. It migrated to The CW when UPN merged with The WB in 2006. *ANTM* remains a central show for The CW in terms of ratings. Its success led Banks to launch a second show, the syndicated daytime talk show, *The Tyra Banks Show* (2005-2010).

Shonda Rhimes wanted to be a lawyer. Although she had completed most of her coursework at Harvard, she dropped out of law school and transferred to the University of Southern California. While working on her M.F.A. at USC, Rhimes interned for producer Debra Martin Chase at Disney. The internship resulted in Chase hiring Rhimes as a research director on *Hank Aaron: Chasing the Dream* (1995). After college, she wrote the teleplay for HBO’s *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* (1999). She also wrote the screenplays for *Crossroads* (2002) and *Princess Diaries 2* (2004).

In 2002, Rhimes made the transition from film to television with a deal with Touchstone Television. Rhimes’s first project, a series about female war correspondents, never made it past the development stage due to the U.S. involvement in Iraq. Her second project was *Grey’s Anatomy*, which premiered in March 2005 as a midseason replacement on ABC. The show’s

---

22 Mok is also an executive producer on *ANTM*. Before *ANTM*, Mok was a producer on *Making the Band* (ABC, 2000-2001) and executive producer on *WWE Tough Enough* (MTV, 2001-2003).


25 Rhimes states she switched to television because: “I wanted to write for grownups a little more because I was doing a lot of teen girl movies and . . . I felt like it was clear that on television, your characters could grow and change and develop and be incredibly flawed in ways that they couldn't be in a big studio movie at the time." Mickey O’Connor, "The Humanist: Shonda Rhimes Hones in on Ethical, Moral Grey Areas," *TV Guide* (2009).


Tyler Perry started as a playwright. His first play, *I Know I’ve Been Changed* (1998), is a gospel musical about adult survivors of child abuse. From 1998-2004, Perry’s plays generated over $50 million in ticket and merchandising sales. Despite this, early television deals that Perry had with Fox and CBS fell through. Fox did not pick up his show, and Perry ended the CBS deal because the network wanted him to make too many changes. Perry decided to leave his television aspirations behind to begin his film career. His first movie, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), an adaptation of his play by the same name, was a financial success. This made the transition to television easier the second time.

For his next attempt at a series, *House of Payne*, Perry wanted complete control. Instead of pitching the idea for *HOP* to a broadcast or cable network, Perry used his own money to produce ten episodes, which he gave away for free to broadcast stations for a trial run in 2005 and 2006. Perry’s innovative strategy resulted in a deal with TBS, which has been described as

---

27 In the spring of 2011, Shonda Rhimes was the executive producer for the short-lived ABC series *Off the Map*. This midseason replacement series was created by a former *Grey’s Anatomy* writer Jenna Bans.

28 In spring 2012, all three shows aired on ABC.


30 Perry paid for the production and a television distribution company, Debmar-Mercury, paid for the distribution costs ($300,000). During the summer of 2005, he did a two week test run in Houston and New York. The show was not well received but Perry believed in his series. He did a second test run in the summer of 2006 in ten cities. Those audiences responded well to the show and TBS made a deal with Perry. For more information see Christopher Lisotta, “Easing the ‘Payne’,” *TelevisionWeek*, April 17 2006; Lacey Rose and Lauren Streib, “Cash for Trash,” *Forbes* 183, no. 5 (2009).
groundbreaking and “one of the most unique business models in TV today.”\textsuperscript{31} Traditionally, cable and broadcast networks order 13-22 episodes of a new series with the hopes that the show will be successful enough to make it several seasons and reach 100 episodes.\textsuperscript{32} The cable network paid him $200 million for an upfront commitment of 100 episodes. Perry delivered all 100 in less than a year. TBS had exclusive rights to the series until September 2008, when it went into syndication. In addition, Perry’s deal with TBS also included complete ownership and creative control.\textsuperscript{33} \textit{HOP’s} success led to TBS ordering additional episodes and a spinoff, \textit{Meet the Browns}. Meanwhile Perry continues to write, direct, and produce plays and films.\textsuperscript{34}

1.3.2 Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as Creators and Executive Producers

Although they have had tremendous success in television, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are exceptions that prove the rule. They all represent rare instances of black public creative figures in mainstream broadcast and basic cable television. I use the term “public creative figure” to describe their role as creator and co-executive producer of their shows. I selected them as case studies because of their industrial impact from 2005-2010. Shonda Rhimes’s \textit{Grey’s Anatomy} played an important role in ABC’s shift from being a network known for its family sitcoms and last in the ratings to a network with critically acclaimed and highly watched dramas. Tyra Banks’s \textit{America’s Next Top Model} was a ratings success for UPN. It was one of the few UPN series to survive the UPN-The WB merger and was very important part of The CW’s launch in


\textsuperscript{34} To date, he has written seventeen plays and fourteen films. Perry also functions as director on his films and television shows. Perry does not write episodes of \textit{House of Payne} or \textit{Meet the Browns} but he comes up with the storylines for the shows.
fall 2006. Tyler Perry’s *House of Payne* helped TBS take its “Very Funny” branding to the next level by being able to create an entire night of original programming on the basic cable network. TBS’s Wednesday night line-up is very similar to its broadcast network counterparts.

Each is important for the way they have carved out a distinctive place for African Americans on ABC, The CW, and TBS. Further, *America’s Next Top Model*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, and *House of Payne* are three prime-time sites of black images on television. These shows offer a range of African American representations and stimulate diverse extra-textual discourses about these representations. Each depicts both the opportunities and constraints for those African Americans both behind and in front of the camera. Although they are not the only shows with black executive producers, *ANTM, GA*, and *HOP* are unique because they are three of the highest rated shows on mainstream broadcast networks and basic cable channels in which their creators and executive producers are black. These shows also represent three primary forms or genres within which African Americans are presently represented on television: the black-oriented sitcom, reality show, and ensemble cast drama.

Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry are exemplars in television. Yet industrially, their success from 2005-2010 has not changed the televsual landscape very much either in front of or behind the scenes. Thus they also represent the limits for racial representations of blackness.

1.4 Blackness in the Media

Most of the debates about race and representations of blackness in the media focus on the texts themselves. Scholars such as Donald Bogle and Thomas Cripps have examined depictions of African Americans in cinema. Both scholars provide a history of representation and the limited presence (and mostly absence) of African Americans in film texts.
did appear onscreen, the roles were limited to the familiar stereotypes in American society such as the Tom, the Coon, the tragic Mulatto, the Mammy, and the brutal Buck (Bogle 2001b). The defining moment in film for early African American representation was D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). The film contained these character types and had a tremendous influence on filmic representations of African Americans for decades to come.

Blacks have been historically underrepresented in television as well (Bogle 2001a). Until the late 1960s, African American representations onscreen were limited to minor roles or musical performances. The success of *Julia* (NBC, 1968-1971) and *I Spy* (NBC, 1965-1968) provided major roles for African Americans actors Diahann Carroll and Bill Cosby. In the 1970s, there was an increase in African American representations on TV with the creation of *Good Times* (CBS, 1974-1979) and *The Jeffersons* (CBS, 1975-1985), sitcoms that featured a predominantly African American cast. The black-oriented sitcom has been the primary source for African American representation on television (MacDonald 1992; Bogle 2001a; Means Coleman 2002; Gray 2004). Early scholarship focused on the historical trajectory of African Americans on television. The monumental task of cataloging these images resulted in limited analysis. Although the information from these studies is valuable, this type of research has its limitations. Examining only the image without in-depth analysis of the industrial, social, or political context simplifies black representations to discussions of a positive image or negative stereotype. My study seeks to take a different approach by exploring the industrial conditions in which Banks, Rhimes,

---


and Perry have been able to successfully create and produce black-oriented and black-featured shows.

1.5 Industrial Context

Examining the industrial context provides insight on the current state of blackness in television and diversity behind the scenes. Amanda Lotz (2007) divides the history of the television industry into three main phases: network era (1950s to mid-1980s), multi-channel transition (mid-1980s to mid-2000s), and the post-network era (mid-2000s-). Each phase has unique characteristics relating to the primary technology used, how shows were created and distributed, and the uses of advertising and audience measurement.

According to Lotz, the television industry is presently in a period of transition, which she identifies as the emerging “post-network era,” in which new technologies and modes of distribution provide viewers with more access and control than in previous decades. For example, viewers have access to hundreds of cable channels and can watch programs on TV, cell phones, and computers. Technologies such as DVRs, iTunes, and On-Demand provide instantaneous access for the audience. In terms of programming, narrowcasting and niche programming are the standard. Lotz claims that most networks are slowly making the transition from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era.

However, though cited by many TV studies scholars (e.g., Caldwell 2004, Spiegel and Olsson 2004; Newcomb 2007, Gray 2009) the term “post-network era” has yet to reach consensus as the appropriate label. Jason Mittell (2010), for example, finds the term problematic because it “suggests that networks no longer matter” and the term “post-network doesn’t say what it is, but asserts what it is not.” Lotz states the term does not mean the end of the network structure, “just the erosion of their control over how and when viewers watch particular programs”
The bigger issue with the term, especially with regards to my study, is that the post-network era has not occurred completely, especially in terms of programming and racial diversity on television. The term seems inaccurate in catching racial dimensions of historical changes in television. Rachel Dubrofsky and Antoine Hardy (2006) argue that the major networks maintain a white middle-class identity and programs that deviate from this standard can be found only on the smaller cable networks. This dissertation supports Dubrofsky and Hardy’s assessment that the broadcast networks support a white middle-class identity and further problematizes the notion of the “post-network era,” especially as it conceptualizes race. Dubrofsky and Hardy’s research is useful for this dissertation because white middle-class is the standard on Grey’s Anatomy and America’s Next Top Model.

Although narrowcasting and niche programming are the standard in the emerging post-network era, there has not been an increase in black-oriented shows on the broadcast networks. In fact, there has not been a black-oriented sitcom on the broadcast networks since 2009. The NBC series Undercovers had tremendous potential as a black-oriented series but only lasted 11 episodes in 2010. Media critic Eric Deggans argues that, during the first decade of the 2000s, niche programming via race remained too much of a risk for broadcast TV executives:

The ratings race is higher and the competition for viewers is more intense, so they're less willing to develop such shows. The networks still view predominantly minority shows as taking a chance, so they're much less likely to take a chance on something that they're not sure about in this competitive environment. . . The thing about TV is that it only takes one show to be a success and there'll be 50 copycats. All it'll take is one successful series with a predominantly minority cast to do well, and someone will copy it. But it'll be harder to get that show on the air.\(^{37}\)

The success of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry on ABC, The CW, and TBS has not resulted in copycats on the broadcast network lineup. In particular, UPN (now The CW), ABC and TBS

took a risk on Banks, Rhimes, and Perry. Because of their success, these three were able to create other shows, but their success did not result in an increase in black-oriented shows, executive producers/showrunners, or creators on the broadcast networks. Perry’s success on TBS resulted in a slight increase in black-oriented sitcoms on basic cable. America’s Next Top Model, Grey’s Anatomy, and House of Payne appeal to a wider audience and demonstrate that in terms of representation we remain in the multi-channel transition. This fact explains why we need to look more closely at industrial changes, the discourse surrounding Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as creators/executive producers, and the texts themselves. Further it suggests we need to reconsider some of the assumptions we may have about periodizing and conceptualizing a “post-network era.”

Looking at the industrial context surrounding an image can help us to understand the pattern and factors contributing to the visibility/invisibility for African Americans onscreen. In the current landscape, African Americans lack choice and control behind the scenes, which also results in a lack of diversity onscreen. A starting point for this examination is the Cosby Moment because of its historical significance in the history of race and television.

1.6 The Cosby Moment (1984-2005)

The television industry does not exist in isolation; other media industries and the broader culture influence the television industry’s business practices and viewing strategies. Herman Gray’s Watching Race looks at how social, political, industrial, and economic factors impacted

---

38 TBS added two additional black-oriented sitcoms (Meet the Browns and Are We There Yet?). Sherri, a black-oriented sitcom on Lifetime only lasted one season in 2009. TV One and BET have expanded their original programming to include black-oriented sitcoms. However, these series premiered in 2011, which falls outside the scope of my research.

39 This will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

racial representations of African Americans on television during the 1980s and early 1990s. Gray argues *The Cosby Show (TCS)* was a culturally significant moment in the history of race and representation on television because the show “reconfigured the aesthetic and industrial spaces within which modern television representations of blacks are constructed” (79). In the previous decade, viewers watched the working-class struggles of the Evans family on *Good Times* and Fred Sanford and his son Lamont on *Sanford and Son* (NBC, 1972-1977). Although George and Louise Jefferson left their working class neighborhood in Queens to move to Manhattan on *The Jeffersons*, the show was very similar to *Good Times* and *Sanford and Son* in projecting white middle-class ideals about African Americans during this period. There were some African American writers on *Good Times, The Jeffersons, Sanford and Son*, and *What’s Happening?* (ABC, 1976-1979), but these shows were run by white executive producers (Hunt 2004; Adamo 2010). Darnell Hunt (2004) claims that Bill Cosby became the first African American showrunner on *The Bill Cosby Show* (NBC, 1969-1971). On the short-lived series, Cosby had control behind the scenes as executive producer. As executive producer, he requested more African Americans be hired behind the scenes and he was actively involved with the writers. However, he had more impact behind the scenes as the executive producer on *The Cosby Show* (NBC) in the 1980s.

For Gray, the “Cosby Moment” contributed to industrial changes for African Americans behind the scenes. As co-creator and executive producer, Bill Cosby had power and influence

---


42 The success of TCS resulted in an increase in black-oriented sitcoms on NBC, CBS, and ABC from 1985-1989 such as 227 (NBC), *Amen* (NBC), *A Different World* (NBC), *Family Matters* (ABC), *Homeroom* (ABC), *Charlie & Company* (CBS), and *Snoops* (CBS). For more information on these shows, other black-oriented sitcoms, and black writers, creators, and executive producers see Dalton Narine, "Black TV and Movie Scriptwriters: The Write Stuff," *Ebony* 43, no. 5 (1988). For more information on black actors on television see
over the direction of the series. He wanted to complicate past representations of African Americans on television. Gray argues TCS changed African American representations on television in the 1980s because it moved away from traditional blue collar, working-class representations of African Americans to focus on a black upper-middle-class family. As executive producer, Cosby hired psychologist Alvin Poussaint as a consultant for TCS. Cosby and Poussaint diligently worked to make sure the Huxtables were a positive representation of African Americans on television (Olopade 2010). Cosby had control over the direction of the show’s storylines, sets, and costumes. He set an aesthetic and industrial precedent. The ratings success of TCS in the 1980s resulted in more black-oriented sitcoms, which in turn led to an increase of African American writers, directors, and creators working in the industry.

Yet, although TCS was a significant event in the history of representation of African Americans on television, it was also seen as problematic by many scholars and cultural critics. TCS may have added a new African American perspective, but it also kept the Huxtable family in isolation. Viewers saw a financially secure upper-middle-class African American family living in a brownstone in Brooklyn, but the Huxtables had little to no interaction with the larger African American community. Financial stability also brought about a shield from racism and other societal issues (Omi and Winant 1994). Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis (2004) argue that TCS used the myth of the “American Dream” to demonstrate equality for everyone. The authors argue that the show did the audience a disservice by not addressing race and larger societal issues within the African American community and other obstacles African Americans faced. On the


43 For more information about TV representation before TCS see Lance Morrow, “Blacks on TV: A Disturbing Image” (Time, 1978); J. Fred MacDonald, Blacks and White TV (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1992); and Bogle, Primetime Blues: African Americans on Network Television.

44 For more information see Watching Race pp. 73-84.
show, the Huxtables were successful because of their hard work and determination; the color of their skin was not an obstacle in achieving their success. Leslie Inniss and Joe Feagin (1995) examined black-middle class responses to TCS. They found that respondents had mixed reactions to the show. In general, they enjoyed it but felt there was a lack of realism. TCS had its limitations but these cannot discredit what the show did for race and representation on television.

Industrially, the Cosby Moment (1984-2005) occurred during what Lotz identifies as the beginning of the multi-channel transition (the mid-1980s to mid-2000s). The expansion of cable, new broadcast networks, and technologies such as the VCR gave the audience more choice and control.45 This also resulted in lower audience shares for ABC, CBS, and NBC.46 One method the broadcast networks and cable channels used to attract audiences was narrowcasting. Instead of creating shows that appealed to the entire family, the networks could produce shows targeted toward those specific audience demographics.47 This strategy was very successful for NBC in particular. St. Elsewhere (1982-1988), Hill Street Blues (1981-1987), and L.A. Law (1986-1994) are examples of NBC programs intended for specific audiences such as baby boomers with disposable incomes.48

One particular television audience that had been mostly overlooked was the African American audience, even though African Americans historically have watched more television than whites (Gray 1995). Although it was a black-oriented sitcom, TCS was a popular sitcom for both black and white viewers. NBC, CBS, and ABC hoped to duplicate the crossover success of TCS, which led to an increase of black-oriented sitcoms such as such as 227 (NBC, 1985-1990),

45 See Lotz chapter one for more information.
46 During the Network Era, ABC, NBC, and CBS were the primary sources for television content. The creation of the Fox network in 1986 and the increase in cable subscriptions resulted in lower audience shares for ABC, NBC, and CBS.
47 For more information see Lotz and Gitlin.
48 For more information, see Gray, 59.
Fox’s programming was particularly influenced by the Cosby Moment. The new network developed black-oriented series such as comedies *Martin* (1992-1997), *Living Single* (1993-1998), and *In Living Color* (1990-1994) and the black-oriented drama *NY Undercover* (1994-1998) to attract black audiences and advertisers. Fox sought the so called “urban audience,” many of whom did not have cable and relied on free network programming for entertainment (Zook 1999). Early Fox stations were more heavily centered in areas with a large African American population such as Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City, Dallas, and Washington, DC. This strategy was very successful for the network. However, Fox gained credibility and advertising revenue, and they dropped most of their black-oriented shows in 1994.  

In 1995, The WB and UPN followed the early Fox template by scheduling black-oriented sitcoms to attract a young urban audience. Instead of looking for a mainstream black-oriented sitcom with crossover appeal, black-oriented sitcoms were adopted as a narrowcasting strategy. Darnell Hunt (2004) calls this strategy “televisual ghettoization;” blocks of programming dedicated to black shows one or two nights a week. UPN and The WB’s ghettoization of black-oriented programming provided an outlet for black talent both in front of the camera and behind the scenes with shows such as *Wayans Brothers* (The WB, 1995-1999), *The Parent ’Hood* (The WB, 1995-1999), *Moesha* (UPN 1996-2001), and *Malcolm & Eddie* (1996-2000). However, when UPN and The WB merged into The CW in 2006, only three black-oriented shows (Every-
body Hates Chris, All of Us, and Girlfriends) made the transition. By 2009, all of these shows were off the air. As of this writing, the five broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, The CW, Fox, and NBC) do not have any black-oriented shows in their prime-time lineup.

Hunt argues the industry is white controlled from the executives running the network to the executive producers in charge of the shows. He describes television as “a highly insular industry in which white decision makers typically reproduce themselves by hiring other whites who share similar experiences and tastes” (17). There are limited opportunities for African Americans working behind the scenes. Although black-oriented sitcoms provide jobs, black writers and executive producers have tremendous difficulty making the transition to mainstream (i.e., predominantly white controlled/produced) shows. For example, even as recently as 2009, television writer and executive producer Felicia Henderson described conditions for African Americans behind the scenes: “Because we [blacks] basically work when Black shows are on the air, and only The CW is airing Black-themed shows . . . what you have are the least number of Black writers working since I started writing [in 1996].”

Sara Finney Johnson, a writer, creator and executive producer of several black-oriented sitcoms, also believes that most black writers work only on black-oriented shows. Johnson claims that she receives plenty of offers to work on black shows, but if she wanted to write for The Office (NBC, 2005-) or 30 Rock (NBC, 2006-) she would have difficulty because of the misconception that she cannot write “outside the black box.”

---

51 All three shows, Everybody Hates Chris (2005-2009); All of Us (2003-2007); and Girlfriends (2000-2008) were UPN shows.
Christine Acham (2004) also agrees that the network system is in white control and believes cable holds the greatest potential for diversity in black-oriented programming. She is not the only scholar to have utopian visions about an increase in black-oriented programming on cable (Brown and Cavazos 2002). Since its inception, cable has been perceived as the outlet for diversity on television (Streeter 1997). Yet, these perceptions are misguided because cable programming, especially cable programming that airs on those networks with sizable resources for high production value series such as TBS, TNT, and USA, in fact looks very similar to its broadcast network counterparts. Hunt says cable does not offer more diversity: “much of the so-called diversity of options available across the cable expanse consists of a deceptively small menu of recycled programming originating with the same handful of media conglomerates” (16).

Some might point to the existence of certain black-oriented cable networks as proof of the great diversity of opportunities for creating and representing blackness. However, a closer look at such operations challenges any such notions. On cable, BET (Black Entertainment Television), became the first cable channel for African Americans in 1980. This cable outlet was designed to be an outlet for diverse programming not found on the broadcast networks. However, the network provided very little original programming. Beretta Smith-Shomade (2008) argues that BET’s founder Robert Johnson created the channel not as an outlet for the African American viewer but to commodify blackness and race for profit. Johnson promoted the channel as a televisual outlet for uplifting the African American community, but his business practices and programming contradict this. Smith-Shomade’s work demonstrates that African Americans in positions of power have been as responsible for the paucity of representations as have whites. Her

---

55 Hunt, ed., 24; Beretta Smith-Shomade, "Narrowcasting in the New World Information Order: A Space for the Audience?," *Television & New Media* 5, no. 1 (2004). BET has mainly relied on music and syndicated programming since 1980. In the last ten years, the cable channel has been slowly expanded its original programming.
research on BET is an example of the intersection of industry and race in television and shows how studying race and representation on television cannot be limited to only onscreen images.

Vincent Brook (2009) argues that the African American audience is being commodified by the broadcast networks as well. The broadcast networks have reality shows and ensemble dramas with multiracial casts. However, this is used mainly as a cost-effective measure and to establish goodwill towards the networks deploying the practice (Brook 2009). It allows the network to look diverse without changing anything behind the scenes. The industrial shift to narrowcasting and niche audiences has not resulted in an increase in black-oriented shows. Although there are African Americans on television, they have typically remained relegated to secondary roles.

In addition to limited roles on black-featured programs, African American actors working on television must deal with the burden of representation. J. Fred MacDonald (1992) describes the burden of black actors: “Because there is comparatively little minority representation in radio, film, and television, and because each performance by African Americans is regarded as a chance to make a statement about black realities, each appearance takes on an added weight” (124-125). Although MacDonald is referring to representations of African American characters and the images of these characters associated with the African American actors who play them, this also applies to African Americans working behind the scenes. Kristal Zook (1999) examines the burden of representation on 1990s-era black-produced television series such as The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air (NBC), The Sinbad Show (Fox, 1993-1994), Roc (Fox, 1991-1994), and South Central (Fox, 1994). As executive producers and creators, the color of their skin adds more weight and responsibility to their work. For example, when Charles S. Dutton, producer and star

---

56 Black-produced is the term Zook uses in her research. Black-produced includes sitcoms and dramas. For more information see Kristal Brent Zook, Color by Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
of Roc, and Sinbad, producer and star of The Sinbad Show, felt their shows relied too much on slapstick and needed more dramatic storylines, they went to the network to discuss changing the direction of their shows. They felt compelled to do so given their distinctive status in a white-dominated industry.

There have been and remain very few black executive producers and creators working in television. For the few that do find work in the business, their race typically becomes part of the promotion and coverage of the show. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry shoulder this burden of representation, which is something their white counterparts do not experience. For example, a 2005 New York Times article about the success of Grey’s Anatomy describes Rhimes as “one of television’s few black showrunners . . . [she] has created a show around her vision of diversity— one in which color is more description than definition— that feels almost defiantly fresh for network television” (Fogel 2005, 16). In a similar New York Times article about another ABC drama, Lost (2004-2010), race is only fleetingly mentioned; the journalist here briefly notes “the unusually large and internationally diverse ensemble cast” (Rhodes 2004). The race of showrunners J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof (both of whom are white) is not mentioned. In contrast, black creators and executive producers such as Rhimes often have their shows and their black characters taken to represent or speak for the entire black community.

1.6.1 End of the Cosby Moment

The Cosby Moment (1984-2005) was a unique period in the history of racial representation on television. The crossover appeal of Bill Cosby and TCS was an anomaly. There has not been another black-oriented show or star to reach this status. Once the major networks felt that they

could not duplicate the financial or ratings success of TCS, black-oriented programming slowly disappeared from the prime-time lineup (Bogle 2001a).

Brook argues that the Cosby Moment ended in May 1999, when the major broadcast networks revealed their new shows for the fall season. ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC had a combined total of twenty six new shows, and these shows lacked African Americans actors in a starring or leading role.\(^{58}\) The only networks with a diverse range of programs in regards to race were The WB and UPN. An additional complication was the lack of diversity behind the scenes: the NAACP also wanted more diversity in executive positions. As a result, the NAACP threatened to boycott the networks. By May 2000, the networks had made separate agreements with the NAACP to increase diversity onscreen and behind the scenes. Darnell Hunt predicted the changes by the networks as part of their agreements with the NAACP would be temporary and cyclical.\(^{59}\) Within a few years, the networks forgot about their agreements with the NAACP and the prime-time lineup reverted back to a predominantly white focus. 2000-2004 was a transitional period regarding diversity onscreen and behind the scenes in the television industry. The enforced NAACP changes resulted in a temporary increase in African Americans onscreen on the big four networks, but this diversity had restrictions. The broadcast networks did increase the number of black-oriented shows. However, only ABC and Fox had any success with adding black-oriented shows to their lineup; *My Wife and Kids* (ABC, 2001-2005) and *The Bernie Mac Show* (Fox, 2001-2006) were the only programs lasting more than one season. The lack of diversity remained problematic but the NAACP did not threaten to boycott or sue again as they did in 1999.

---

\(^{58}\) African Americans were not the only group overlooked. None of the new shows starred an actor of color or had an actor of color in a leading role.

Although I agree with Brook that the Cosby Moment is over, it did not end in 1999. Instead, the events in 1999 signaled the decline of the Cosby Moment. Instead of identifying it as the “Cosby Moment,” a better label is the “Cosby Era.” When Gray’s Watching Race was originally published in 1995, TCS had been off the air for three years. The term “Cosby Moment” was an appropriate label because it was “a stage in historical or logical development” in blackness and television. Cosby Era is a better term because although TCS has been off the air for 20 years, all shows that aired after TCS are frequently measured against it. These shows include The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air (NBC, 1990-1996), Family Matters (ABC, 1989-1998), My Wife & Kids, The Hughleys (ABC, 1998-2000; UPN, 2000-2002), and Everybody Hates Chris (UPN/The CW, 2005-2009). I argue that the Cosby Era ended in May 2005 when My Wife & Kids ended after four seasons and there was only one black-oriented program left, The Bernie Mac Show, on the big four networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) for the fall.

1.7 The Neo-Cosby Moment (2005- )

Although there was only one black-oriented show on the big four, there were eight black-oriented shows, all sitcoms, available for viewers, on UPN in fall 2005. This was the highest number of black-oriented shows to air on one broadcast network channel ever. Even during the height of TCS’s popularity, NBC only aired four black-oriented sitcoms during one season. Fox never aired more than four black-oriented shows in one season as well. During the Cosby

---

61 The four shows were The Cosby Show, Amen, 227, and A Different World. In spring 1988, NBC had five black oriented shows on the air, the aforementioned sitcoms and the mid-season replacement drama Sonny Spoon (1988-1988).
Era, The WB and UPN utilized black-oriented shows as a programming strategy, but neither one had eight shows in one season.63

I label this new moment the “Neo-Cosby Moment” because traces of the Cosby Era remain and the importance of the black-oriented sitcom as the dominant programming form for African American representation onscreen and employment behind the scenes. I also identify it as the “Neo-Cosby Moment” because I am only examining the first five years, 2005-2010, of this transitional moment; this time frame also intersects with the emerging post-network era. The Neo-Cosby Moment is similar to the Cosby Era in that the end result has been aesthetic and industrial changes. Whereas the original “Cosby Era” was aesthetically limited to the sitcom, this new moment represents significant developments for sitcoms, dramas, and reality television.64 During this period, black-oriented sitcoms started to decline on the broadcast networks but find a new home on cable starting with Perry’s House of Payne in 2007. On the broadcast networks, black-oriented programs were replaced with multicultural ensemble dramas such as Grey’s Anatomy. Reality programs such as America’s Next Top Model provided a diverse group of contestants. HOP represents the black-oriented sitcom, and GA and ANTM represent black-featured programming during the Neo-Cosby Moment.

In addition, the ascendance of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as successful showrunners signals a “Neo-Cosby Moment” for industrial changes in race and representation on television. In the Neo-Cosby Moment, there are only a few black executive producers and creators in television but these few are quite high profile. Banks and Rhimes have found different types of success in an industrial landscape in which black-oriented programs (and African Americans working be-

63 In the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 seasons, The WB had five-black oriented shows in its prime-time line-up. During this same time, the UPN had six.
64 The industrial shifts that occur in the Neo-Cosby Moment will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two and the representational changes will be discussed in Chapter Four.
hind the scenes) have almost entirely vanished from the prime-time broadcast network lineup. This condition problematizes formulations of the post-network era and forces us to reconsider it in relation to race in more precise terms. As the industry shifts from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era, scholars must also make a transition in their analysis and examination of these changes. Figures such as Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are faced with the burden of representation, which is seen in the discourses surrounding their images in the media as public creative figures.

1.8 Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as Star Producers/Public Creative Figures

Banks, Rhimes, and Perry represent what the NAACP wants from the television industry: more diversity both in front of the camera and behind the scenes. All three are executive producers/creators of black-featured or black-oriented programs on broadcast and basic cable networks. They are also the public creative figures for these programs. I use the term “public creative figure” instead of “showrunner” because I am interested more in how mainstream and trade publications recognize them as the key creative figures of their respective shows as well as how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry view themselves in this role. I am less interested in if Banks, Rhimes, and Perry actually perform these duties.

As the public creative figures, they are the official spokespeople for their shows. In this role, they are often presented as responsible for a show’s success or failure.65 Most examinations of key creative figures come from non-academic sources such as industry trade publications or popular press books.66 Further, most books on the subject consist of interviews with white executive producers. Coverage on black creative figures in prime-time television is extremely limited

in the popular press and, even more so, in scholarly works. This dissertation provides a bridge between non-academic and academic examinations of the black public creative figure by examining how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are three very important black public creative figures in Neo-Cosby Moment.

During the multi-channel transition, public creative figures had an increased presence in the media discourse surrounding their programs. They were often presented as stars in a manner similar to those who appear onscreen. The star image has long had a powerful role in society. A star is someone that “circulates through the culture in a variety of media- magazines, newspapers, websites, and other television programs and has culturally delimited meanings associated with it” (Butler 2002, 50). Richard Dyer (1998) argues a star’s image is a complex one that is industrially constructed through promotion, publicity, films, and commentary. Through these discourses, stars present ideologies of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.

Scholarship on this topic is as complex as the stars themselves, especially in terms of the use of terminology. The popular terms in the literature are “star,” “personality,” and “celebrity.” John Ellis (1982) makes a clear distinction between the film “star” and the television “personality.” Most scholars follow Ellis’ divisions, but some scholars such as Jeremy Butler (1991) do not make that distinction. For Butler, there is a difference in film stardom and television star-

---

67 Steven Prigge interviewed Yvette Lee Bowser, creator and showrunner of Living Single, for his book. Darnell Hunt briefly discusses black showrunners and identifies Bill Cosby as the first showrunner in the conclusion of Channeling Blackness. Kristal Zook does a great job of providing information about black creators and executive producers on Fox and UPN. Also see Gregory Adamo, African Americans in Television Behind the Scenes (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).


dom, but a difference in terminology is not needed. Graeme Turner (2004) uses the term “celebrity” in his examinations of fame in popular culture. He defines celebrity as “a genre of representation and a discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity, and media industries that produce these representations and their effects” (9).

The distinctions between star, celebrity, and personality are crucial to these case studies because of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s unique position in the media. All three receive media attention because of their role as public creative figure. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (2007) argue that it is difficult to make these distinctions because stars/celebrities/personalities are not limited to only one medium as they have inter-textual and cross-textual appeal. James Bennett and Su Holmes (2010) make a distinction between the television star and the television personality. For these authors, a “star” is an actor on a fictional program and a “personality” refers to presenters and other figures/actors in non-fictional programming. In this dissertation, I use the term personality. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry qualify as personalities because of their public image as creator and executive producer for their respective shows. Although Banks and Perry appear onscreen on their shows, for this project I am interested more in their image as a public creative figure working off-screen.

In acting as the public creative figures for a range of programs, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are interesting case studies for television celebrity. They are “icons of intertextuality” (Lusted 1991). They created popular television programs, which added a new dimension to their fame and celebrity. Dyer (2004) argues stars have a market function; they are used to sell a film or television series. P. David Marshall (1997) states that television celebrities are connected more to

---

70 Butler, ed. Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television. Mary C. Beltrán also refers to television personalities as stars. For more information see Beltrán.

the economics of the television industry than their film counterparts. This is especially true for Banks, Rhimes, and Perry. They are now known for creating successful (i.e., profitable) shows on mainstream broadcast and basic cable networks. As public creative figures, their job is to promote their shows and continue delivering successful programs to their respective broadcast networks and cable channels. All three utilize the Internet and social networking as well as media interviews to connect with their fans directly and sustain their image as public creative figures, points that will be discussed later. They are part of the industrial machine and responsible for creating stars on their shows as well as being personalities themselves.

As public creative figures, being in control behind the scenes is part of their image. However, Francesco Alberoni (2005) claims that in reality, stars have limited power. They are part of the social elite but they do not have any authority behind the scenes. Richard Dyer explores stars’ battles over the lack of control of their images. Dyer examines how Marilyn Monroe, Paul Robeson, and Judy Garland fought against their lack of power. These three were part of the studio system, in which their stardom was attached to a specific genre and personality type. Garland verbally spoke out, Monroe fought for better parts, and Robeson eventually quit making films. The issue of control continues today albeit in a different economic and industrial context. For example, Rebecca Williams (2005) explores how Drew Barrymore took control over her image and transformed it from “bad girl” roles to the leading lady in romantic comedies. Barrymore made the transition through the creation of her own production company, Flower Films. This ownership provided her with control behind-the-scenes and onscreen. Williams claims that perceptions of control are just as important as control: “it is not that movie stars should be considered authors or auteurs, but rather the social and cultural patterns that stars embody should be
worthy of study” (112). As television personalities, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry exemplify social and cultural patterns regarding race in their image as the public creative figure.

In addition to control, another theme in a star’s image involves representation. Stars have an ideological and cultural function. Their images and behaviors reinforce or dispute dominant ideologies regarding race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. 72 Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (2007) describe stars’ function as:

Star and celebrity representations are there to be read, unpacked, or ‘deconstructed’ so that the ideology that burns dimly within them is actually revealed to be a burning bright light that draws attraction, commands attention, and shapes people’s way of thinking and being. (258)

Although most star studies focus on actors, the amount of coverage on Banks, Rhimes, and Perry in mainstream and trade publications makes them worthy of study as personalities. In the case of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry, they function as black creators/executive producers. Race is a significant part of their image. This approach provides a way to examine their images in the media as black producers and creators and their contributions. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are celebrity “texts” and they produce “texts.” As the public creative figure, being in control and controlling what viewers see is part of their image as television personalities. Furthermore, in order to understand the industrial and aesthetic changes occurring in the Neo-Cosby Moment, it is useful to examine how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry position themselves as black public creative figures. Moreover, the amount and type of coverage of these executive producers and their shows reveals the position of racial representation of blackness in the current media industries. However in ex-

amining the role race plays in their image, it is necessary to examine the social and cultural significance of race in society.

1.9 Examining Race

This dissertation acknowledges that race is a social construct used to categorize and identify (Downing and Husband 2005). For Machery and Faucher (2005), the social constructive definition of race is “the belief that a classification based on skin color and other skin-deep properties like body shape or hair style maps onto meaningful, important biological kinds—is a pseudo-biological concept that has been used to justify and rationalize the unequal treatment of groups of people by others.” I use the terms “African American” and “black” interchangeably throughout the dissertation to discuss racial representation of blackness on television. The decision to use both terms comes from a 2008 “Black America Study” which found participants evenly divided on being described as “black” or “African American.” To examine blackness on television, I use Herman Gray’s definition of the term:

By using the word blackness I mean to focus attention on the operation of blackness as a cultural signifier that, although operating on the basis of specific histories, dynamics, and relations of power, nevertheless remains open to multiple and competing claims. More specifically, I use blackness to refer to the constellation of productions, histories, images, representations, and meanings associated with black presence in the United States. . . I use the notion of blackness as a sign quite deliberately as a way to examine various positions and claims on it both from within the African American community and from outside of it.

For Guess (2005), examinations of the social construction of race must also include a discussion of whiteness:

---

74 The study found that 42% preferred the term “black” and 44% preferred the term “African American.” For more information about the “Black America Study” see Adam Armbruster, “Informed Buyers Are Better Buyers: Study of Black Americans Goes Beyond Mere Demos to Motivation,” MediaWeek, September 15 2008. The study’s findings are located at http://blackamericastudy.com.
As a basic feature of social organization, “race” in American society largely depends upon what we mean by whiteness and its significance in patterning social interaction and social organization between whites and non-whites. We can observe historical moments in the social construction of knowledge about “race” and the power of whiteness in America by describing types of concrete social action from which the social and political significance of whiteness emerged.76

Television is an example of the power of whiteness in American society. On television, whiteness has been the predominant image presented to viewers. Richard Dyer argues that whiteness dominates in American culture and society because “White people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their image . . . it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal”77

In the following pages, I use the terms race, black, and African American, blackness, and whiteness to examine the industrial and cultural context of diversity on television and behind the scenes. As a white researcher and scholar, I acknowledge that these terms are social constructs that I am using to categorize and identify black presence onscreen and off-screen in the Neo-Cosby Moment.78 I am categorizing and identifying blackness within the larger social and historical context of whiteness. My goal with this project is to explore how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry present themselves as black public creative figures in the media and how their personas are connected to representations of blackness in their texts. I am also interested in examining how these personas and images embody larger discussions about race in American society.

Two terms used the most to discuss race in contemporary American society are “color-blindness” and “post-racial.” Using these labels to analyze racial representation in media is complicated because the terms have multiple meanings depending on the author or scholar

According to the theory of colorblindness, the color of one’s skin is not important and one will advance in society based on his or her merit. The term evolved from the Civil Rights Movement (Omi and Winant 1994). In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. described his vision for colorblindness as “a nation where they [his children] will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” A “post-racial” society is defined by Jennifer Esposito (2009) as one in which “we have moved beyond race and that race no longer structures our thinking or our actions . . . racial categories have no meaning”(1).

Ralina Joseph (2009) prefers the term post-racial over colorblindness “because “it highlights the continued centrality of race in this ideology where race is ostensibly immaterial” (239). She maintains that this term makes race central to the discussion and acknowledges the very thing it denies. Joseph argues the media reinforces a post-racial ideology in which “racism no longer exist[s] . . . [and] race itself no longer matters” (239). Joseph argues that the post-racial identity is so deeply embedded in our society that deviations or ruptures are temporary. In addition, she finds the post-racial ideology problematic because of the racial inequalities present in our society. When stars of color reinforce a post-racial ideology they promote the idea that meritocracy and hard work equals success, while ignoring the structural, institutional, and historic forces that make a colorblind society impossible in the U.S (Joseph 2009).

Jennifer Esposito also argues that the colorblind myth attempts to structure society as post-racial even though it is not post-racial. She explores post-racial representations in the ABC sitcom Ugly Betty (2006-2010). In 2008, shortly after the election of Barack Obama, the series aired an episode about affirmative action. A white male character claims Betty received a position because “she filled a quota.” From Esposito’s perspective, Ugly Betty curtailed any discus-

---

sions about affirmative action through Betty’s response. She turns down the job because she wants it based on her ability, not skin color, which “reifies the notion that one must succeed on her or his own without anyone’s assistance” (13). Esposito worries about the impact Ugly Betty and other shows that promote the post-racial myth have on viewers: “popular culture texts, like Ugly Betty, are discursive practices that have material consequences on real bodies. These texts then contribute to current discourses about race and racism, which also struggle and shape the ways we live” (6).

These terms are problematic because they are easily distorted. Theodore M. Shaw (2006) argues that the concept of colorblindness, “conceived by civil rights advocates as a shorthand description of the nondiscriminatory society they struggled to create, has been hijacked . . . in order to support anti-affirmative action goals” (162). Omi and Winant (1994) argue that the concept of colorblindness is a misleading and dangerous facade: “we are compelled to think racially, to use the racial categories and meaning systems into which we have been socialized . . . it is not possible or even desirable to be ‘colorblind’” (159). The assumption of colorblindness contributes to another form of racism: by promoting a view of an equal-opportunity society in which people succeed based on merit instead of skin color, the topic of racism and ongoing structural constraints is then completely ignored. Henry Giroux (2009) claims that “while ‘post-racial’ may mean less overt racism, the idea that we have moved into a post-racial period in American history is not merely premature- it is an act of willful denial and ignorance” (575).

Ralph Banks (2009), meanwhile, argues the post-racial ideology indulges the fantasy that society

---

80 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 159. The authors examine the influence of race on politics and the influence of politics on race in America from the 1960s to 1990s. They found that the colorblind myth is the predominant view on race in American society.

has moved beyond race. But, he argues, we are not in a post-racial society because “American society continues to be racially segregated and fraught with racial disparities in health, employment, education incarceration, etc.” (55).  

Although these terms have been useful, a new term is needed to examine the place of race within current media industries. Mary Beltrán (2010) states that examining racial representation in the current media landscape “raise[s] the need for new methodological tools and theoretical frameworks . . . in this supposed post-racial era.” Ralph Banks (2009) suggests the term “neo-racial” to describe race in American society. He uses the term for legal analysis and scholarship, but it is also applicable for examining race and representation in television and other media. In a neo-racial society, racial inequities still exist but conditions for people of color are not as bad as they once were. Moreover, Banks states that racism is not the primary cause of these inequities:

The neo-racial approach suggests that we should no longer accord racism and colorblindness the primacy that they have long enjoyed in analyses of racial inequality. We should resist the reflexive tendency to simplistically depict contemporary controversies as yet further evidence of racism. Racial inequality persists as a consequence of a complicated interplay of historical and contemporary factors, and our analyses should reflect that complexity. Similarly, as pertains to colorblindness, we need to recognize that in the concrete settings where racial controversies arise, general principles like colorblindness are not helpful in crafting good policy. Rather than attempt to overcome colorblindness, scholars would work around it—limiting the principle, balancing it against other legitimate principles, and, when useful, invoking it. The neo-racial sensibility would prompt race and law scholars to approach race-related controversies in a pragmatic manner that both takes seriously competing views and interests and seeks resolutions that reflect widely shared values.  

For Banks, a new term is necessary because “the election of Barack Obama signifies a break with our racial past” (41). C.J. Ogletree’s (2009) description of racial progress also sup-

---

ports the use of a neo-racial framework. He argues that we are not in a post-racial society and describes racial progress over the last 150 years as ebbing and flowing: “As a nation we have come a long way from the unconscionable days of slavery and legalized racial segregation but we have not yet arrived at a time and place where race no longer matters” (5).

Banks prefers the term “neo-racial” because it removes discussions about race from the constrictions and fantasies of colorblindness and a post-racial America. The term neo-racial is valuable for scholarship on racial representation. A neo-racial framework is useful for this dissertation because it acknowledges the successes and failures of the current media industries and these creators/executive producers in their media texts. It also acknowledges a shift in race and representation in television. Television’s neo-racial phase is marked by the rise of a limited number of black creative figures in the Neo-Cosby Moment. Using the term neo-racial acknowledges racial inequities as well as the fact that the current inequities are a “complicated interplay of historical and contemporary factors, and our analysis should reflect that complexity” (Banks 2009, 55). There are still profound racial inequities in the television industry, but the inequities are not as bad as they once were. This dissertation examines the complexity of the historical moment dating from 2005-2010 by surveying the industrial context, the public discourse, and the texts to see how they work together to continue to reinforce the myths of a colorblind/post-racial society or if they promote a neo-racial ideology.

Investigating Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s public image as public creative figure thus presents another way to examine, understand, and situate media texts and paratexts especially in relation to race. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are valuable case studies because they publicly nego-

---

85 Jonathan Gray describes paratexts as materials that enhance our understanding of a text. Examples of paratexts include promos, DVD extras, fan videos, merchandising, and online resources (e.g. blogs and twitter). For more information see Jonathan Gray, Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts (New York: New York University Press, 2010).
tiate race and their role as black creators and executive producers in different and distinctive ways. There are multiple connections between how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry engage in discussions of race in interviews and how racial representations of African Americans appear on their shows.86

1.9.1 Racial Representations in the Text

Although examining the industrial context and discourse surrounding the public creative figure can tell us why there is a lack of blackness onscreen and diversity behind the scenes, the text itself can provide information on how blackness is actually presented. Jason Mittell and Katrina Bell-Jordan are two scholars who believe the text remains central to analyzing representations on television. Their work builds upon Herman Gray’s canonical examination of blackness on television in the 1980s and 1990s.

Jason Mittell (2010) recommends looking beyond the image and examining the representations within the context of the entire show. He argues that these representations not only provide images of blackness but also a window for viewers to any images outside of their own age, region or class: “televised representations are a chief way of imagining others outside of their context, and thus they bear tremendous power in shaping people's cultural perspectives” (314). Similarly, Katrina Bell-Jordan (2008) also recommends moving beyond the image. She states that racial representations onscreen “inspire and reflect a negotiation of the meanings of race and have the potential to influence the way we think about racial issues” (357). Bell-Jordan argues the show’s narrative plays an important role in how race is constructed and presented. Her examination of the reality shows Black.White (FX, 2006), Survivor (CBS, 2000- ), and The Real

86 This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.
World: Denver (MTV, 2006) saw how race was used as a narrative tool that “rel[jied] on familiar archetypes and forestall[ed] meaningful dialogue on race and racial issues” (358).

For Herman Gray (2005), blackness onscreen functions “as cultural sites for the articulation of specific desires, meanings, relations, local histories, and struggles of black life in the U.S.” (84). In Watching Race, he classifies representations of blackness into three categories: assimilationist, pluralist, and multiculturalist. I argue that Gray’s terms remain a useful tool for examining current representations of blackness on television in spite of my application of a neo-racial frame. Moreover, I intend to build upon his work by using these terms as a lens to examine representations of blackness on America’s Next Top Model, Grey’s Anatomy, and House of Payne.

Assimilationist programs treat race as an individual issue and problem. Shows that follow this pattern use race narratively as a “special episode.” These are shows that generally promote equality and colorblindness such as Family Ties (NBC, 1929-1989), L.A. Law, The Golden Girls (NBC, 1985-1992), and Designing Women (CBS, 1986-1993). Race is only an issue when an individual who is racist and does not believe in colorblindness temporarily enters the narrative of the show. By the end of the episode, either the person has seen the error of his or her ways or is summarily rejected by all regular participants in the show’s narrative. The show then returns to the status quo of race not being an issue. Assimilationist shows position race from a white middle-class perspective: “whiteness is the privileged yet unnamed place from which to see and make sense of the world . . . blackness simply works to reaffirm, shore up, and police the cultural and moral boundaries of the existing racial order” (86-87). On most assimilationist programs, the white middle-class characters are the voice of reason and the “sympathetic advocates” for

87 For more information see Gray, Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness 85.
equality. Characters of color need their help in dealing with racism and prejudice. The white characters help the racists see the error of their ways.

In pluralist programs, African Americans exist in a separate but equal world. The characters on shows such as 227, *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, or *Family Matters* experience similar situations and scenarios as their white counterparts but they are isolated from the rest of the world. Pluralist programs are different from assimilationist programs because they acknowledge racial differences. The shows never address why these differences exist (e.g. historical, political, and cultural factors). These shows offer more diversity than assimilationist programs but “are also tethered to this hegemonic white middle-class universe in yet another way—through the conventional formulas, genres, codes, and practices that structure their representations” (88).

Gray’s final category, multiculturalist, is different from the other categories because of the “construction and positioning of African American culture at the very center of its social and cultural universe” (89). Multiculturalist shows also engage in the black experience from multiple positions. *A Different World* (NBC), *Frank’s Place* (CBS, 1987-1988), and *Roc* (Fox) fall into this category because they engage in narratives about significant issues within the African American community such as poverty, racism, and apartheid. For example, the characters on these shows would often examine the class differences not just between blacks and whites but also within the black community. Whereas assimilationist and pluralist programs might use such tensions for one single episode, multicultural programs acknowledge these differences throughout the series.

---

88 Ibid. For more information see pp. 86-87.
90 For more information see pp. 87-88
91 For more information see pp. 90-91
92 Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness*
Gray’s categories provide a useful lens for examining broadcast network television in the 1980s and 1990s. However, these categories are also challenging because a show can be placed in more than one category. Gray cites *The Cosby Show* as a program that was both pluralist and multiculturalist. He notes that when a show falls into more than one category, it creates a discursive space “in which subject positions are transgressive and contradictory, troubling and pleasurable, as are the representations used to construct identity” (90). Gray acknowledges the limitations of his categories and claims that any analysis of blackness on television requires a “sharper, more engaged analytic focus on the multilayered, dialogic, intertextual, and contradictory character of racial representations . . . we must theorize and understand them in relation to other television representations and to discourses beyond the television screen” (92). Yet, the complexities of Gray’s terms can thrive within a neo-racial framework. *In Watching Race*, Gray examined the politics of representation by exploring the industrial and cultural context surrounding these images. In this project, I examine the connections between how blackness is presented on *GA*, *HOP*, and *ANTM* and their public creative figures as well as the larger industrial environment.

In addition, most of the programs Gray categorizes are sitcoms on the broadcast networks during the multi-channel transition. The more recent explosion of reality programs, development of multiracial ensemble dramas, and the expansion of original content on cable in the last decade has provided new avenues for scholars and new ways of theorizing race and blackness. My case studies represent these changes. *ANTM* is a reality show, *GA* an ensemble drama, and *HOP* is part of TBS’s transition into original comedies.

Due to the prevalence of reality television on the broadcast and cable network television landscape, Mark Orbe (2008) states that more research of racial representations on these shows is necessary. He also argues that “representations take on meaning within a larger televisual expe-
perience” (351). Reality television shows have become a staple on broadcast and basic cable networks, but the presence of a black host or executive producer on these shows is rare. Tyra Banks is the only one on a broadcast network. In spite of the rise of reality TV, sitcoms and dramas are still worthy of study. For example, the major broadcast networks do not have any black-oriented sitcoms on their schedule. To experience these shows, viewers must turn to basic cable networks. *Grey’s Anatomy* is a successful medical drama with a multiracial cast, but the characters of color are not the main characters. In addition, the success of this program did not lead to more diversity on ABC. It is worth noting that the characters of color were not featured in a GA spinoff, *Private Practice*, also created and executive produced by Shonda Rhimes.

This dissertation fulfills Orbe’s call for more analyses of racial representations on reality television by examining race and representation on *America’s Next Top Model*. Furthermore, because reality shows rely on other genres such as dramas and soap operas to tell their stories, these findings are applicable to fictional programs. Genre blending/hybridity complicates the categorization of race and blackness solely by genre/form. *ANTM, GA*, and *HOP* are current mass-mediated representations of African Americans on prime-time television. Although they are not the only shows that provide black images, they are three of the most popular and financially successful for their respective channels. Further, all of these blend genres to varying degrees.93

---

Sasha Torres (2005) uses *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (ABC, 2003-2012) to demonstrate the shift in racial representations in the early 2000s.\(^\text{94}\) The author argues that racial representation functions as a commodity and the networks use race to appeal to a fragmented audience and “within these representations, racial difference becomes a commodity, on offer, much like those on offer in the commercials for today’s hip progressive consumer, for whom race is presumably no big deal” (405). She sees this audience-as-a-commodity as a new form of televisual racism. In the past, televisual racism consisted of African Americans as stereotypes. Torres argues this older form is almost nonexistent in the current television landscape. She states a new form of racism “lies in the ways its representations tend to wrench persons of color out of the still-pervasive political context of white dominance and out of the still-relevant social context of communities of color. In the process, real, political, social, and economic inequities disappear” (406-407).

Though Torres’s discussion of commodifying racism is a useful one, it is a dangerous assumption to operate as though stereotypes have disappeared. Rachel Dubrofsky and Antoine Hardy’s (2008) research builds upon Herman Gray’s findings that “black representation on television must adhere to the standards of middle-class whiteness or function as a site of difference or otherness.”\(^\text{95}\) The authors examine racial construction on the reality dating programs *The Bachelor* (ABC, 2002- ) and *Flavor of Love* (VH1, 2006-2008). They found *The Bachelor*, the ABC broadcast network program, supports a white middle-class identity and *Flavor of Love*, the cable version, allows room for multiple identities. The authors acknowledge that *Flavor of Love* contains traditional stereotypical representations of African Americans as well as “a unique

---

\(^{94}\) Torres says this shift started first in sitcoms in the 1990s such as *Will and Grace* that utilized sexuality as a commodity. She states that *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* does the same thing with race.  
space for racial identity and the vocal claiming of identity” (373). In addition, GA, ANTM, and House of Payne contain familiar stereotypical representations of African Americans on television. Yet, House of Payne in particular, provides more space for complex black identities than the other two. This is because of its status on cable and the unique deal Tyler Perry made with TBS.

The aforementioned scholars demonstrate that analyzing the text remains a crucial component for examinations of race on television. The case studies in this dissertation will illustrate how both forms of televisual racism (stereotypes and race as commodity) exist in the current landscape. For ABC and The CW, the diversity present on Grey’s Anatomy and America’s Next Top Model provide an outlet “to garner as many fragments of the post-cable audience as possible in order to sell them to advertisers” (Torres 2005, 405). House of Payne has been a ratings success for TBS; the basic cable network has benefited from the absence of black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks. The representations of blackness in ANTM, GA, and HOP demonstrate that the current televisual landscape is far more complicated and analyzing multiple texts is necessary, especially in this neo-racial, Neo-Cosby Moment.

1.10 Significance of Project

From 2005-2010, there was a significant decrease in black-oriented sitcoms on broadcast networks.96 The head of the NAACP Hollywood Bureau describes the status of race and representation on television in 2010: "do we feel that people of color are represented appropriately on network television? No. . . . Name one show today with an African-American lead.”97 The black-oriented sitcom remains the primary outlet for leading roles, but these programs are now

---

96 For the 2005-06 television season, there were 8 black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks. By the 2009-10 season, there was only one black-oriented sitcom on the prime-time lineup.
limited to cable channels. Although Tyler Perry has been successful on TBS, black-oriented programs also have a limited presence on cable.

Banks’s *America’s Next Top Model*, Rhimes’s *Grey’s Anatomy*, and Perry’s *House of Payne* are vital case studies because they represent three of the few instances of black representation on mainstream broadcast and cable channels in the post-network era that are presented to a “mixed” audience, which complicates prior constructs about the post-network era. Their shows offer a range of African American representations and extra-textual discourses about representations. Although they are not the only shows with black characters, they are unique because they are the popular shows on-air in which their creators and executive producers are black.

As case studies, Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry demonstrate the utility of using a neo-racial framework to examine race and representation on television. Using the term allows us to admit that race remains a complicated issue in contemporary American society. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are exemplars in television yet they remain part of a small group of African American executive producers currently working in the television industry. This framework allows scholars to examine positive improvements as well as inequities that remain in the television industry. It also acknowledges that to understand these complexities we must examine the interplay of historical and contemporary factors from 2005-2010. This dissertation examines the relationship between race and the television industry, popular and trade press discourse, and the text.

1.11 Research Methodology

Julie D’Acci’s work on gender, representation, and television provides a useful framework for examining race, representation, and television. D’Acci’s (2004) circuit of media study is rooted in cultural studies and builds upon Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model, Richard John-
son’s circuit of the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural products, and Open University’s circuit of culture.

The circuit of media study is an integrated approach to studying television that engages with four interrelated sites or spheres. These four sites are: production, reception, programming/cultural artifact, and socio-historical context. The production site involves studying the production process but it is not limited to participant observation of television programs. This site includes examining the function of the industry as an economic and social sector. The reception sphere involves the institution of viewing and viewer interactions. In the programming/cultural artifact sphere, the televised content is evaluated. The television images are not examined as isolated images but within a narrative or stylistic context. The socio-historical context looks at how social movements and society influence the television industry and the images created within it. The circuit of media study allows for different methodologies to be used among the sites. Furthermore, D’Acci states scholars do not have to use all four in their research, but they must at least acknowledge the other sites.

The circuit of media study is a constructive model for this dissertation because it incorporates approaches to industry, discourse, and text. In my analysis, I will be focusing on the socio-

---

99 In previous works, D’Acci refers to the Circuit of media study as an integrated approach. In the integrated approach, D’Acci refers to production, programming, reception, and socio-historical context as spheres instead of sites. In the circuit of media study model, D’Acci changes programming to cultural artifact.
101 Ibid.
102 D’Acci, "Television, Representation, and Gender," 384. The stylistic context consists of mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound. In addition to narrative and stylistic context, D’Acci states programming can be evaluated within a generic context.
103 Ibid., 385.
historical context, production, and programming sites.\footnote{This study examines the production process but not as observation or analysis of the actual production of these programs. I am examining production in terms of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as executive producers/creators.} Although I am not examining the audience explicitly, it is important to acknowledge that reception is interconnected to the other sites and that the industry always constructs the audience in particular ways. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry have created successful shows that have lasted for several seasons and over one hundred episodes each. All three acknowledge the importance of the audience and connecting with their fans.

This model is also helpful in the examination of race and representation on television because representation is not a separate site: “each of the four sites is involved in generating or constructing representation . . . and each needs to be examined and analyzed for the way it does so.”\footnote{D’Acci, ”Television, Representation, and Gender,” 381.} D’Acci argues that “Representation is what television is all about, denoting as the term does, signs, symbols, images, portrayals, depictions, likenesses, and substitutions.”\footnote{D’Acci, ”Gender, Representation, and Television,” 91.} There is something to be learned from the fact that these very \textit{atypical} figures are arguably more successful than the previous exemplars of black media. Therefore, we should see if their success changes the conversation about race and representation on television.

An industrial analysis is useful to look at the connection between race behind the scenes and onscreen. Havens, Lotz, and Tinic (2009) state that D’Acci’s circuit of media study made a significant contribution to critical media industry studies. Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz (2012) believe a goal of critical media industry studies is “to explain a particular phenomenon evident in television programming through interrogation of the industrial conditions in which it is located.”\footnote{Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz, \textit{Television Studies} (Malden, MA: Polity Press 2012), 106.}
For Gray and Lotz, Ron Becker’s (2006) work on the increase in gay and lesbian representations on prime-time television in the 1990s is an example of a critical media industry studies approach. Becker found that the broadcast networks increased representations of gay and lesbian characters as an industrial strategy. During this period, the broadcast networks continued to experience audience fragmentation as viewers had more options available to them such as cable and the ability to time-shift programming through the use of VCRs. Historically, gay and lesbian representations have had a limited presence on the broadcast networks. Increasing their visibility on prime-time appealed to a niche audience, which Becker refers to as the “slumpy” demographic: social liberal urban-minded professionals. Becker utilized trade press, industry discourse, and popular press coverage to examine the industrial shifts that resulted in an increase in gays and lesbians in prime-time.

In Chapter Two, I utilize a critical media industry studies approach to analyze the industrial conditions of the Neo-Cosby moment from 2005-2010. The goal of this chapter is to understand how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry have thrived in an industry that continues to lack in diversity onscreen and behind the scenes. This dissertation examines industrial shifts in broadcast network television and basic cable from 2005-2010. As previously noted, 1999 was a significant year in the history of racial representation of African Americans on television. Black-oriented sitcoms and black leading characters on shows were back to the pattern of invisibility, at least on the four major broadcast networks. This moment has been well documented by scholars. My interest lies in what happened within the industry after this point. Lotz argues that 2005 is the starting point for the post-network era. This year was also very important for Banks,

Rhimes, and Perry. In 2005, America’s Next Top Model was one UPN’s highest rated shows, Grey’s Anatomy was a midseason hit for ABC, and Tyler Perry’s Diary of a Mad Black Woman was a financial success. I also identify 2005 as the start of the Neo-Cosby Moment. In this chapter, my primary focus is to examine the connection between industrial shifts during this period and diversity behind the scenes. I am placing discourses about industry (post-network era) in conversation with discourses about culture (post/neo-racial) and demonstrating the analytical complications that emerge as a result.

Using trade publications such as Hollywood Reporter, Variety, and Broadcasting & Cable, I examine industrial changes that resulted in the decline of black-oriented shows but also allowed for Banks, Rhimes, and Perry to succeed. I also use trades to construct the history of these industrial shifts from 2005-2010. Additional sources include popular newspapers and magazines such as New York Times, USA Today, Los Angeles Times, TV Guide, Newsweek, Vanity Fair, and Entertainment Weekly. Furthermore, I incorporate African American publications such as Jet, Essence, Ebony, The Root, Black Enterprise, and The Crisis into my analysis. I use these resources to historically contextualize the industrial shifts in mainstream broadcast networks and basic cable channels from 2005-2010. ABC, The CW, and TBS serve as case studies, representing the networks that aired the shows by Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as well as the breadth of ad-supported TV.

In addition to their success behind the scenes, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry have become star television personalities. In Chapter Three, I conduct a star study of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as public creative figures. Dyer’s methodology remains a useful tool for examining current stardom/celebrity (Holmes 2005). Dyer notes that all star studies are limited; it is impossible to cover every aspect of a star’s image in one study. My examination of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry is
limited to their role as public creative figure for their prime-time television programs from 2005-
2010. The people in control (or in this case publicly promoted as the ones in control) can reveal
as much if not more than the actors about current ideologies about race in society. My goal with
this chapter is to see if Banks, Rhimes, and Perry present themselves as black public creative fig-
ures using a post-racial/colorblind or neo-racial ideology.

To examine Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s images, mainstream, niche and trade publications
are used. The mainstream publications include, but are not limited to, TV Guide, Entertainment
Weekly, USA Today, and The New York Times. African American targeted publications such as
Ebony, Jet, and Essence. Hollywood Reporter, Variety, and Broadcasting & Cable are also used
to provide an industrial perspective on Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as the public creative figure. I
base the data accrued from how Rhimes, Perry, and Banks represent themselves in these publica-
tions from 2005-2010. I also include social media forms such as emails, websites, and blogs.
While Banks and Rhimes use Twitter, Perry regularly sends emails to his fans. All three use the-
se technologies/platforms to promote their shows and reinforce their image as creator/executive
producer. Cumulatively, the mainstream, niche, and trade publications as well as the online re-
sources are the media texts that create Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s image as the public creative
figure. These resources can fall into Dyer’s categories of publicity, promotion, and criticism and
commentary.

Lastly, this dissertation is also an ideological analysis of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s texts.
Exploring the industrial context and how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry position themselves as pub-
lic creative figures provides a deeper context for examining representations of blackness on their
shows. As three of the most successful black public creative figures, their shows provide images
of race and blackness to millions of viewers each week. It is important to explore how blackness
is presented onscreen to supplement off-screen discourses. I textually analyze *America’s Next Top Model*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, and *House of Payne*. Furisch (2009) defines textual analysis as a “type of qualitative analysis that, beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text” (239). I use seasons 1-6 of *Grey’s Anatomy* and *House of Payne* and cycles 1-15 of *America’s Next Top Model*. Because of the large number of episodes and the fact that each series is a different genre, I use Herman Gray’s categories (assimilationist, pluralist, and multiculturalist) as a framework to conduct a representational analysis of the text. My goal with this chapter is to extend Gray’s historical analysis of blackness on television by examining how blackness is presented on *ANTM, GA, and HOP* in the Neo-Cosby Moment.

My analysis includes dealing with characterization and narratives to see how blackness is presented on these shows over the course of several seasons/cycles. I conduct a close textual analysis of selected episodes from the aforementioned seasons/cycles. I reviewed episodes of these shows from my personal archives and online archives. I am interested in how these programs construct and use race narratively in the context of the entire series. This type of analysis is useful to see if these programs reveal any challenges or changes to the familiar representational landscape of the past.

1.12 Chapter Outline

This dissertation argues that Banks, Rhimes, and Perry present to the press and public different perspectives on how to negotiate race behind-the-scenes as creators/executive producers as well as in their final product. It also shows the spectrum of possibilities and constraints in contemporary mainstream television for blacks behind the scenes and in presenting blackness on tel-

---

109 *ANTM* does not air in seasons but cycles. The CW airs two cycles a year.
110 For episodes missing from my personal archive, I watched episodes using Hulu, YouTube, and iTunes.
evision screens. These figures have found different types of success in an industrial landscape in which black-oriented programs (and African Americans working behind the scenes) have almost entirely vanished from the prime-time broadcast network lineup. During the course of the following chapters, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are set up as three important and distinctive case studies in the examination of blackness on television and diversity behind the scenes. I combine theories from star studies, textual analysis and industrial analysis to frame the context in which their shows and celebrity images operate. These three approaches are used in tandem with a blended methodology that incorporates discourse and ideological analysis to analyze the negotiation of race and the public tensions these creative public figures experience.

Chapter Two analyzes the industrial conditions of the Neo-Cosby Moment from 2005-2010. This chapter historically contextualizes the industrial shifts in mainstream broadcast networks and basic cable channels from 2005-2010 as it relates to blackness onscreen and diversity behind the scenes. ABC, The CW, and TBS are the focus of this chapter because they are the outlets for Grey’s Anatomy, America’s Next Top Model, and House of Payne. I will also position ABC, The CW, and TBS in relation to the rest of the industry as it has moved from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era. I argue that, contrary to Lotz’s claim that the post-network era is emerging, all three programs remain firmly situated in the multi-channel transition and problematize the ways the post-network era is viewed, especially in terms of race, diversity, and representation.

In the current television landscape, diversity remains an issue both in front of the camera and behind the scenes. Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry are perfect case studies to examine shifts in the television industry that have resulted in a limited presence of blackness on-screen and diversity behind the scenes. Examining the industrial context surrounding their suc-
cess during the Neo-Cosby Moment provides insight into how black-oriented programming has
become non-existent on the broadcast networks. Most African Americans in positions of power
primarily work on black-oriented sitcoms. While this new moment also takes into account the
increase in programming types such as reality shows and ensemble cast dramas, black-oriented
sitcoms remain the key outlet for diversity behind the scenes. In fact, the void of black-oriented
sitcoms on the broadcast networks provided an opportunity for TBS to serve as an outlet for these shows. I argue that TBS is using a familiar counterprogramming strategy of televisual ghett-o-
ization to increase its viewership. According to Darnell Hunt, The WB and UPN used this strategy during the 1990s to build their audiences. This analysis reveals that Perry's success is owed strongly to the merger of The WB and UPN into the CW, which paved the way for his unpreced-
dented deal with TBS.

Chapter Three looks at how Banks, Perry and Rhimes promote and publicize themselves as the key creative figure of their shows. One aspect that all three have in common in their image as public creative figure is the way race, specifically blackness, plays a role in their image as a television personality. This chapter uses interviews from magazines and industry publications as well as emails, blogs, and Twitter postings from Banks, Rhimes, and Perry to see how they construct their star image in relation to blackness and being in control in their public relations. How they present themselves as black public creative figures reveals certain ways race works in our society. This analysis places each individual in different sites of the burden of representa-
tion, each handles this burden differently. Perry’s discourse about race and being a black public creative figure conform to a neo-racial perspective. He acknowledges the limitations within the industry as well as the improvements (e.g., Tyler Perry Studios is the first African American owned film and television studio in the U.S.). Rhimes adheres to a post-racial perspective; she
dismisses or ignores discussions about race and her role as a black public creative figure. Banks, meanwhile, falls in between Perry and Rhimes. Sometimes she adheres to a post-racial perspective in which race does not matter, and other times she admits that things are not equal but better than they were. The fact that their race is part of their discourse as public creative figures demonstrates that we are not in a post-racial society and that race does matter when it comes to African Americans in power behind the scenes.

Another key component to Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s image as public creative figure is control. The amount of control Perry has behind the scenes is central to his image as public creative figure. Rhimes’s image primarily focuses on her control over the narrative direction of *Grey’s Anatomy*. Because of her former modeling career, Tyra Banks’s image centers on proving she is qualified to be a public creative figure. The chapter finds that there is a correlation between how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry negotiate their roles as black public creative figures and how racial representation is presented in their texts.

Chapter Four examines the connection between the role blackness plays in Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s image as public creative figure and how it is represented in their texts. This chapter provides a representational analysis of *America’s Next Top Model*, *Grey’s Anatomy* and *House of Payne*. Although *GA* has a multiracial cast, the show is assimilationist because it promotes a post-racial discourse in which everyone is equal and race is an individual issue, not a societal one. When the show does address race, it is treated as an issue within the individual and shown on screen as a “very special episode.” *HOP* is a multiculturalist program because it examines issues from multiple positions of class and economics. *ANTM* challenges Gray’s terms because it is both an assimilationist and multiculturalist program. It is an assimilationist program because of the modeling industry’s criteria for success. The models can use their race to make
them unique but they must still fit into the mainstream/white standards of beauty. It is also multiculturalist because Banks and the models discuss race and the challenges of being a model of color in the industry.

This chapter demonstrates that Gray’s categories remain relevant but also complicates his construction of categories in ways that reflect historical shifts. The fact that Gray’s terms remain a useful lens to examine blackness on television and diversity behind the scenes demonstrates that the mainstream broadcast networks and basic cable channels remain in the multi-channel transition and not in the emerging post-network era, particularly in terms of textual representation. I conclude by arguing that Rhimes fails to develop a dialogue on race and representation beyond the familiar terrain of individualism whereas Banks and Perry address fuller societal implications of the subject.

Chapter Five summarizes the dissertation’s findings, making the case that Banks, Rhimes, and Perry negotiate race in different ways both in their role as producers and in the onscreen representations in their shows. Perry represents a fuller understanding of the societal underpinning of race and representation both in his engagement with the media and his programs. Nevertheless, Rhimes remains, with Perry and Banks, a significant figure in the Neo-Cosby Moment.

As some of the most high-profile African American creative figures in television today, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are useful case studies in understanding the current textual and industrial landscape and its boundaries in broadcast and cable television. The chapter suggests that further work needs to be done on audience reception to develop a greater understanding of how these negotiations impact both the black community and television audiences in general. Also, future research should examine other cable channels such as BET and TV One and their expansion into original fictional programming. There is also a need for research and analysis on black-
oriented web series and podcasts. Additional research should also explore other African Americans working behind the scenes on mainstream broadcast network and basic cable programs such as Felicia Henderson, Mara Brock Akil, and Pam Veasey.

2 DIVERSITY IN THE POST-NETWORK ERA

2.1 Introduction

On October 12, 2005, Apple introduced the first video-capable iPod. With its 2.5 inch screen, the video iPod allowed users to download not only music videos but also television shows and movies. Steve Jobs’ press conference for this new iPod also included an announcement of a deal with Disney to provide ABC and Disney Channel shows through the iTunes store. For $1.99 per episode, consumers had access to ABC’s Lost, Desperate Housewives (2004-2012), and The Night Stalker (2005), as well as the Disney Channel’s That’s So Raven (2003-2007) and The Suite Life of Zack and Cody (2005-2008).

The Apple-Disney deal marked the first time a broadcast network’s programs were available in a pay-per-download format. The first seasons of Lost and Desperate Housewives were available through iTunes, and viewers had access to the latest episodes the day after they aired on ABC. This provided ABC with another revenue stream for its programming and a new platform for viewers to watch these shows. During the first two weeks of its launch, Apple sold over one million music videos and TV show downloads through iTunes.111

Amanda Lotz (2009) describes this date as marking the “beginnings of the post-network era” (8). She defines the post-network era as consisting of a shift in technology, production, distribution, and advertising in television, all of which greatly impact television programming.

---

These shifts gave viewers more choice and control. During the multi-channel transition (mid 1980s-mid 2000s), viewers started to have an increase in televisual options due to the expansion of cable and the ability to time-shift programs through the use of the VCR. However, in the post-network era viewers have more options than ever before. Television viewers can watch their favorite programs on multiple platforms such as tablets, mobile phones, and portable media devices. With the Internet, DVRs, and Video-on-Demand, viewers do not have to watch a television program during its live broadcast and can watch these programs at their leisure.\

Lotz argues these shifts, as part of the production component of the television industry, impact what appears onscreen. Lotz states that “viewers have come to enjoy a meaningful increase in and expanded diversity of programming as a result of the industrial changes of the multi-channel transition and emerging post-network era” (2007, 254). She cites Sex and the City (HBO, 1998-2004), Survivor (CBS), The Shield (FX, 2002-2008), Arrested Development (Fox, 2003-2006) and Off to War (Discovery Times, 2005) as examples of the impact of these changes. Each of these shows provides a diversity of narratives not seen on television before. Industrial changes presented an opening “for new stories to be told on television” (216).

Significantly, Lotz overlooks issues of representation, especially racial representation, as it relates to diversity in her analysis. This chapter historically contextualizes the industrial shifts on ad-supported broadcast networks and basic cable channels from 2005-2010 as it relates to blackness onscreen and diversity behind the scenes. During this period, the broadcast net-

---

113 Ibid. For more information see Chapter 7.
114 Lotz does explore issues of representation as it relates to gender. However, she admits that by only examining the production aspect of the television industry, “other parts receive minimal attention despite their relevance to the changes that mark the emergence of the post-network era.” Ibid., 46.
works shifted from featuring black-oriented shows to favoring black-featured programming in which African American actors had significant but primarily supporting roles. A small number of black-oriented programs were located mainly on basic cable. Further, while black-featured programming increased African American visibility onscreen, it did not have the same effect behind the scenes. ABC and The CW (and the other broadcast networks) used black-featured programming as a way to avoid a larger problem, which involved the lack of diversity behind the scenes.

2.1.1 The Decline of the Cosby Era (2000-2004)

As discussed in the previous chapter, 2000-04 was a transitional period in the Cosby Era. African Americans working behind the scenes had limited opportunities available to them on the broadcast networks. If black writers and executive producers wanted to work, they had to go to The WB or UPN, the only broadcast networks providing much black-oriented programming. Very few African Americans had the opportunity to work in positions of power on shows other than black-oriented sitcoms.115

In 2004, Yvette Lee Bowser, creator of Living Single (Fox), described how myopic the industry could be regarding African American talent behind the scenes: "If there's a project that needs to be supervised with a Caucasian star, I'm not the first person [network executives] think of. Projects about us are open to Caucasian writers, but the reverse is not necessarily true."116 During this period, very few African Americans had success on big four networks that were not black-oriented programs. Haiyma Washington worked as an executive producer on The Amazing Race (CBS, 2001-). Pam Veasey worked as the executive producer on The District (CBS, 2000-04) and then CSI: NY (CBS, 2004-). Veasey’s journey to executive producer documents the

115 Hunt, ed.
struggle African Americans have had in the industry. Veasey started working as a writer on black-oriented shows in the 1980s. After working on Fox’s *In Living Color*, she was offered a writing position on *Living Single*. Veasey rejected the offer because “It would look the same on my resume as what I had just done. You can’t let the business decide you’re just a ‘black-writer,’ or that’s all you’ll ever be.”

Veasey spent her time writing spec scripts for dramatic series and eventually landed a job as a writer on *Martial Law* (CBS, 1998-2000) and then *The District*.

A more promising outlet for African Americans working behind the scenes was cable, especially premium channels such as HBO and Showtime. From 2000-04, HBO aired several original movies and mini-series starring African Americans such as *Disappearing Acts* (2000), *The Corner* (2000), *Boycott* (2001), and *Something the Lord Made* (2004). Showtime also aired original movies such as *Ruby’s Bucket of Blood* (2001), *Bojangles* (2001), *Keep the Faith, Baby* (2002), *10,000 Men Named George* (2002), and *Good Fences* (2003). However, Showtime was known better during this period for its series *Soul Food* (2000-2004). *Soul Food* focuses on the lives of three African American sisters after the death of their mother. The television series was an adaptation of the 1997 film of the same name and picks up where the movie ended but with a different cast. The hour long dramatic series was a hit for Showtime. During its first season, *Soul Food* became the most watched series ever for the premium cable network.

The series lasted five seasons. Although the series was a triumphant moment in the history of race and representation of African Americans on television, it was located on a premium cable network. To watch this show, viewers had to subscribe to cable and pay an additional fee for Showtime.

---


118 “‘Soul Food’ Keeps TV Viewers Hungry for Drama and Intrigue,” *Jet*, January 22 2001. The article does not provide numerical information about the total number of viewers.
Two additional cable outlets for African American viewers were BET and TV One. However, both channels had limited original fictional programming during the Cosby Era. During this period, BET was known for programs that showcased music videos (Video Soul, 1981-2000), news programs (BET News, 1988-), and specials (Celebration of Gospel, 2000-; BET Awards, 2001-). BET also filled its schedule with syndicated black-oriented sitcoms that previously aired on the broadcast networks. From 2000-04, reality programs were a popular form on the broadcast networks and basic cable. BET did not launch its first reality series, College Hill, until 2004.\textsuperscript{119} TV One did not begin broadcasting until 2004 and mostly relied on syndicated black-oriented sitcoms and movies for its programming.\textsuperscript{120}

During this period, the only networks with a diverse range of programs in regards to race were The WB and UPN. African American representation on ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC was limited to minor or supporting characters within a mostly white ensemble cast. The NAACP’s threat to sue and boycott the networks in 1999 resulted in a temporary increase in African Americans on the big four from 2000-04. Both ABC and CBS had medical dramas with African Americans in starring roles. ABC’s Gideon’s Crossing (2000-2001) starred Andre Braugher and CBS’s City of Angels (2000) starred Blair Underwood and Vivica A. Fox. ABC had better success with mid-season replacement My Wife and Kids in spring 2001. In fall 2003, NBC aired Whoopi (2003-2004) and The Tracy Morgan Show (2003-2004), the first black-oriented sitcoms on the network since the mid-season replacement For Your Love (1998-2002). NBC canceled For Your Love after six episodes, but The WB picked up the series.\textsuperscript{121} In the 2002-03 season,

\textsuperscript{120} TV One had very little original programming from 2004-2010. Most original programming consisted of musical specials (TV One Night Only: Live from Essence Music Festival, 2009-) or reality programs (Unsung, 2008-; Life After, 2009-). The cable channel did not start creating original scripted programming until 2010, which will be discussed later in more detail. For more about the history of TV One see Johnnie Roberts, "The Power of One," Essence, October 2007.
Fox had three black-oriented programs: *The Bernie Mac Show*, *Cedric the Entertainer Presents* (2002-2003), and *Wanda at Large* (2003).

The start of the 2005-06 season marked the end of the Cosby Era and the start of the Neo-Cosby Moment as there was only one black-oriented program on the big four and eight on UPN. It appeared as if there was going to be a revitalization of black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks. The inclusion of eight black-oriented shows on the UPN also meant an increase in African Americans working behind the scenes. On UPN, only two series, *Love Inc.* (2005-2006) and *Half & Half* (2002-2006), were not created by African Americans, and *All of Us* was the only UPN black-oriented sitcom that did not have an African American executive producer. Although this was the first time a broadcast network had this many black-oriented programs as part of its schedule, it would also be the last time. Although this was a temporary resurgence, it marked the end of the Cosby Era and the start of the Neo-Cosby Moment.

2.1.2 The Neo-Cosby Moment (2005-)

As discussed in the previous chapter, I am identifying this transitional period as the Neo-Cosby Moment because traces of the Cosby Era remain as the sitcom remains an important programming form for diversity on television. During the “original” Cosby Era, these changes occurred in black-oriented sitcoms because that was the primary source of African American representation on television. Generally, the black-oriented sitcom remained an outlet for representa-

---


123 Betsy Borns, the executive producer for *All of Us*, is white. Will Smith, Jada Pinkett-Smith, and Borns are listed as the show’s creators. Although Kelsey Grammer is listed as an executive producer on *Girlfriends*, Mara Brock Akil was the show’s executive producer/showrunner.
tions of blackness onscreen. However, the formal changes in the Neo-Cosby Moment also include reality shows and ensemble cast dramas.\textsuperscript{124}

Moreover, the ascendance of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as successful showrunners signaled the Neo-Cosby Moment for industrial changes in race and representation on television. The Neo-Cosby Moment started during a significant industrial moment: the emerging post-network era. This year was also very important for Banks, Rhimes, and Perry. In 2005, America’s Next Top Model was one UPN’s highest rated shows (having premiered in 2003), Grey’s Anatomy was a midseason hit for ABC, and Tyler Perry’s first film, Diary of a Mad Black Woman was a financial success. This chapter historically contextualizes the industrial shifts in mainstream broadcast networks and basic cable channels as it relates to the Neo-Cosby Moment.

This chapter takes a critical media industry studies approach to analyzing the industrial conditions of the Neo-Cosby Moment from 2005-2010. Timothy Havens, Amanda Lotz, and Serra Tinic (2009) recommend this approach because it provides a “general framework for examining media industries that we believe can bring new important ways of understanding, conceiving, and studying the media industries from a critical perspective . . . [and] emphasizes middle level fieldwork in industry analyses, which accounts for complex interactions among cultural and economic forces.”\textsuperscript{125} I use this framework to examine how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry have thrived in an industry that continues to lack in diversity in front of and behind the camera. Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry are perfect case studies to examine shifts in the television industry that have resulted in a limited presence of blackness onscreen and diversity behind the scenes. Examining the industrial context surrounding their success in the Neo-Cosby Mo-

\textsuperscript{124} I will examine these changes in more detail in Chapter Four. 
ment demonstrates that, in terms of representation, we remain in the multi-channel transition and not in the post-network era.

As previously discussed, there is a direct correlation between African American representation onscreen and diversity behind the scenes. The industrial context plays a major role in the presence/absence of black-oriented shows on television. Narrowcasting and niche marketing are industrial tools used to increase visibility onscreen. In the past, race has been used as a tool by the networks to bring in African American viewers. Black-oriented programs have come to be viewed as a disposable commodity for broadcast networks and cable channels.

From 2005-2010 on the broadcast networks, viewers experienced a significant decrease in the number of representations of blackness onscreen, which also resulted in a decrease in diversity behind the scenes. The traditional outlet for blackness on broadcast television had been black-oriented programs, specifically the black-oriented sitcom. Yet during this time, such shows completely disappeared from the broadcast network prime-time lineup. In 2005, there were eight black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks; by 2010, there were zero. Although there was an increase in African Americans on television through ensemble casts, these actors were mostly in supporting roles while white performers held the lead roles. The increase in narrative diversity in the emerging post-network era should have an impact on diversity onscreen, but it has not on the broadcast networks.

On basic cable, there was a moderate increase in African Americans onscreen, but this “broader scope of minority representation” must be examined within a broader industrial context. Jennifer Fuller (2010) argues that cable’s use of black-oriented programming as “edgy or risky” programming is a familiar strategy used by cable to not only attract African American

---

viewers but also younger white viewers, which in turn attracts advertisers. Fuller claims that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, HBO, Showtime, and Comedy Central used this technique to draw audiences and advertisers to outlets like Comedy Central. This pattern continued from 2005-2010, as TBS added three black-oriented original programs (House of Payne, Meet the Browns, and Are We There Yet?) to its prime-time schedule. TBS knew these shows would attract African American viewers and, ideally, young white viewers. In addition, black-oriented reality programs on basic cable, such as VH1’s Flavor of Love, increased the presence of African Americans on viewers TV screens. However, some critics and viewers had concerns about the way African Americans were presented on these shows.\(^{127}\) In addition, the increased presence of African Americans on cable reality shows did not result in an increase in African American executive producers. Flavor of Love and its spinoffs (e.g., I Love New York, 2007; Flavor of Love Girls: Charm School, 2007; Rock of Love with Brett Michaels, 2007-2009; and Rock of Love: Charm School, 2008-2009) were created and produced by Cris Abrego and Mark Cronin, who are white.\(^{128}\)

Thus, while it is true that from 2005-2010 there was an increase in black-oriented programming on cable, the continued decrease on the broadcast networks remains troubling. The broadcast networks have increased diversity onscreen through the casting of minority actors as part of a mostly-white ensemble cast. The lack of diversity on the broadcast networks receives more attention from television critics, scholars, and organizations such as the NAACP and the Writers Guild of America because the broadcast networks still reach a larger viewing audience.


than cable. Also it has been well documented that African Americans watch more television than whites, and urban audiences during the multi-channel transition had limited cable access. Yet, the broadcast networks, paradoxically, do not seem to care. In most reports or articles about the lack of diversity in television, the primary focus is with onscreen representations. These same pieces sometimes address the absence of African Americans in positions of power behind the scenes but that topic is usually not covered in as much detail.

Yet African Americans are not in positions of power behind the scenes on these shows. The addition of three black-oriented sitcoms on TBS is a step in the right direction. The TBS shows increased diversity onscreen and behind the scenes. TBS is using House of Payne, Meet the Browns, and Are We There Yet? (2010-) to appeal to African American viewers and younger white viewers by identifying them as family-sitcoms. Sitcoms generally attract a younger audience, and the basic cable network has used the genre to attract a younger demographic. Also black-oriented sitcoms have more African Americans working behind the scenes than other programming forms. Tyler Perry and Ali LeRoi are the creators and executive producers for these TBS shows and have hired African American writers, directors, and producers.

Examine the industrial context during the first five years of the Neo-Cosby Moment (2005-2010) demonstrates that we are not in a post-network era or an emerging post-network era,
at least in terms of representational issues. In the Neo-Cosby Moment, there are but only a few black executive producers and creators in television. Banks’s *America’s Next Top Model*, Rhimes’s *Grey’s Anatomy*, and Perry’s *House of Payne* each were flagship programs for their networks. From 2005-2010, ABC, The CW and TBS went through major changes and these shows figured prominently in each network’s evolution. For example, during this period, some basic cable channels such as TBS attempted to transform from “niche” channels to more mainstream ones. TBS accomplished this through the creation of the “Very Funny” brand and adding original sitcoms to its lineup. Also during this period, UPN and The WB merged to create The CW. This had a tremendous negative impact on black-oriented sitcoms and African American writers and executive producers on those programs. Meanwhile, the addition of ensemble dramas helped ABC move out of fourth place in the ratings.

The financial and popular successes of *ANTM*, *GA*, and *HOP* have been integral to each of their networks during this period. Yet their successes come at a time when diversity behind the scenes remained at an all-time low. Examining the circulation about the popular and financial success of these programs within an industrial context will explain how these three figures carved a unique path within the television industry during a dire time for African American prime-time fictional programming.

ABC, The CW, and TBS are the focus of this chapter because they are the outlets for *Grey’s Anatomy*, *America’s Next Top Model*, and *House of Payne* and because they are representative of the broadcast network and basic cable landscape. Throughout this chapter, I also position ABC, The CW, and TBS in relation to the rest of the industry as it has moved from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era. I argue that, contrary to Lotz’s claim that the post-network era is emerging, all three remain firmly situated in the multi-channel transition and
Thus these case studies problematize the ways the post-network era is constructed, especially in terms of race, diversity, and representation both onscreen and behind the scenes.

2.2 *Industrial Shifts on ABC, The CW, and TBS from 2005-2010*

2.2.1 ABC

From 2005-2010, ABC went through a transitional period during which the network shifted from being the home of family comedies and reality shows to a broadcast network with a wide range of programming appealing to female viewers. The network had made some major miscalculations in the early 2000s.\(^{132}\) One example mainly was the over-scheduling of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* (1999-2002) from one night a week to several nights a week. The over-saturation of the popular quiz show was disastrous for the network. ABC also struggled to find a replacement for its aging procedural *NYPD Blue* (1993-2005). In addition, the network had trouble producing a successful dramatic series. ABC (and the other broadcast networks) wanted to duplicate the success of cable networks, which were succeeding with shows such as *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *Oz* (HBO, 1997-2003), *Queer as Folk* (Showtime, 2000-2005), *Monk* (USA, 2002-2009), and *The Dead Zone* (USA, 2002-2007) (Gillan 2011).

In terms of the big four, ABC was in fourth place as of 2004. The only ABC program to make it into the top 10 most watched shows was *Monday Night Football* (1970-2005).\(^{133}\) CBS had found ratings success with its procedural dramas (*NCIS*, 2003-; *CSI*, 2000-; *CSI: Miami*, 2002-) and reality shows (*Survivor, The Amazing Race*). NBC had the still high-ranking *Law & Order* (1990-2010) and *Law & Order: SVU* (1999-) and reality hit *The Apprentice/ Celebrity*

---


Apprentice (2004- ). Fox had the most success with reality programming due to the ratings juggernaut, American Idol (2002- ).

As a result, in April 2004, ABC made significant organizational changes. Stephen McPherson became the president of prime-time entertainment for ABC. Previously president of Touchstone Television (a Disney property like ABC), McPherson was instrumental in developing hit series such as Scrubs (NBC, 2001-2008; ABC, 2009-2010) and Monk. Touchstone Television had presented both series to ABC and the network passed on them. The network also passed on CSI, which became a hit franchise for CBS (Ryan 2004). McPherson subsequently took over a network that was in fourth place in the coveted 18-49 adult demographic. In addition, the network had experienced a 13% decrease in adults 18-49 and a 9% decrease in overall viewers from the 2003-04 season (Ryan 2004). McPherson had a lot of work to do starting with the May upfronts, in which the network presented the fall lineup to advertisers.

McPherson took ABC in a new direction with its programming. As noted above, ABC previously was known for its family comedies such as Growing Pains (1985-1992), Full House (1987-1995), Home Improvement (1991-1999) and Roseanne (1988-1997), but for the 2004-05 season the broadcast network decreased the number of sitcoms in its prime-time lineup. For fall, ABC only had eight sitcoms airing in comedy blocks on Tuesday and Friday evenings. The 2004-05 fall lineup included existing programs such as The Bachelor, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, According to Jim (2001-2009), My Wife and Kids, and George Lopez (2002-2007). The new shows were reality shows Wife Swap (2004-2010) and The Benefactor (2004), sitcoms Rod-

---

134 In 2008, the series changed its name to Celebrity Apprentice in which celebrities compete to win money for the charity of their choice.

With only a few weeks until the upfronts, McPherson had to use the pilots selected by the previous regime (Ryan 2004). Luckily, he had worked with executive producers Marc Cherry (Desperate Housewives) and J.J. Abrams (Lost) during his tenure at Touchstone Television. McPherson was also able to work with an up-and-coming executive producer/creator, Shonda Rhimes, on her new show Grey’s Anatomy, which would premiere as a midterm replacement.

By fall 2004, McPherson’s network had two big hits with Lost and Desperate Housewives, helping ABC move to third in overall ratings. Lost, a drama-mystery about survivors of a plane crash on a mysterious island, and Desperate Housewives, a soap-drama about the lives of a group of housewives on Wisteria Lane, were different than other programs on ABC or the other networks. Fortune magazine praised ABC’s fall schedule noting that: “ABC did something right in choosing different and edgy shows this year . . . smart when your industry’s product lineup is so look-alike that reality shows and crime dramas constitute 37.5% of the prime-time schedule.”136 According to Variety, the immediate success of two shows was rare: “the last time a network experienced such instant success was 1994 when NBC’s ER (1994-2009) and Friends (1994-2004) premiered to immediate hit status.”137 It was also significant because ABC had not had a hit drama for several seasons.138 Grey’s Anatomy, which premiered the following winter, was part of this significant ratings comeback for ABC. Along with Desperate Housewives and Lost, the show helped moved the network out of fourth place in the ratings in 2005 and revive the dramatic series on the broadcast networks.

138 Ibid. Although the trade publication does provide information about the last time ABC had a hit drama, from 2000-2003, the only new ABC drama to make it to a second season was Alias (2001-06).
The shows’ successes impacted the entire industry; these programs “did not just revive ABC; it also helped the big six stem what had become a seemingly endless tide of ratings erosion.” Variety claimed that ABC revived the ensemble drama with Lost. For the 2005-06 season, most of the broadcast networks (ABC included) had what Media Week called the “Lost clones:” Threshold (CBS, 2005), Surface (NBC, 2005-2006), Supernatural (The WB/ The CW, 2005-2006), Invasion (ABC, 2005-2006) and The Night Stalker (ABC). Surprisingly, while also successful, Desperate Housewives did not inspire many clones (at least initially).

Grey’s Anatomy started as a midseason replacement for Boston Legal. ABC scheduled the medical drama for four weeks starting in February 2005 in the Boston Legal time slot at 10:00 PM on Sunday evenings. The show was an immediate ratings success for ABC. The first episode garnered 16 million viewers. Grey’s Anatomy performed so well in the ratings that ABC extended the series beyond four weeks and postponed Boston Legal until the fall. By the end of the first season, the show had 22 million viewers. Grey’s Anatomy was the most-watched show at 10:00 on any night on ABC for adults 18-49. According to Variety, GA was the fifth most-watched show for adults 18-49 during the 2004-05 season. This marked the first time ABC had three shows in the top ten (besides Monday Night Football) since 2000. Desperate Housewives ranked third on the list. However, this was a major accomplishment for a program that started in the middle of the television season.

---

140 I would also argue that Grey’s Anatomy and Desperate Housewives were also successful ensemble dramas for ABC. Josef Adalian, “’Chris’ Can’t Miss with Critics,” Variety, August 29 2005.
145 American Idol took first and second place on the list. Other ABC shows that made the top 25 were Extreme Makeover Home Edition (10th), Lost (13th), and Boston Legal (21st). For more information see Rick Kissell, “Now for the Big Finish,” Variety, May 27 2005.
The fall 2005 prime-time schedule looked very promising for ABC. On Sunday evenings, the network had two successful dramas, *Desperate Housewives* and *Grey’s Anatomy*, starting their second seasons. *Monday Night Football* continued its thirty-plus year reign, and *Lost* moved to a later timeslot. However, having three successful series did not automatically mean that ABC was going to become the top-rated broadcast network.

The success of the *Lost, Desperate Housewives*, and *Grey’s Anatomy* trifecta provided ABC with three much-needed hits, but other dramatic series on its schedule were not as successful. For example, in 2005, ABC added three new dramas to its fall schedule: *Commander-in-Chief* (2005-2006), *Invasion*, and *The Night Stalker*. Critics thought *Commander-in-Chief* and *Invasion* would be the network’s breakout hits. However *Commander* was up against the *Amazing Race* (CBS) and *Invasion* had to compete with *CSI: NY* (CBS). *The Night Stalker* also had tough competition from *CSI* (CBS) and *The Apprentice* (NBC). These new ABC shows were not breakout hits and in fact did not make it to a second season.

Thus, despite its newfound successes, from 2005-2010 ABC continued its trend of launching more new shows than any other broadcast network every fall. In 2006, ABC had two major changes to its fall prime-time lineup: the historic shift of *Monday Night Football* to basic cable channel ESPN and the move of *Grey’s Anatomy* from Sunday to Thursday nights. The network filled its Monday prime-time gap with reality shows *Wife Swap* and *The Bachelor* and the drama *What About Brian* (2006-2007).

---

The bigger story that year for ABC was the GA move to Thursday nights. Variety called the move a “gut-wrenching, insomnia-inducing schedule risk.” Steven McPherson said the move was essential: “We’re rebuilding. We’ve got a lot of work to do . . . We need to move it [Grey’s Anatomy] to build our schedule.” The network used GA to support two new series: Ugly Betty at 8 PM and Six Degrees (2006-2007) at 10 PM.

The move put GA, in its third season, against CBS ratings powerhouse CSI. CSI was the most-watched scripted series on Thursday nights. Although risky, Advertising Age described why the move to Thursday was necessary: “[Thursday is] one of the most competitive evenings on TV . . . other networks also put their best fare on this night, all the better to attract more studios, retailers, and others who want to drive consumer behavior for the weekend.” McPherson had faith in the show and its creator/executive producer Shonda Rhimes. On GA, Rhimes served as an executive producer and head writer. Rhimes was responsible for the narrative direction of the show. She wrote or co-wrote most of the episodes in the first season and continued to write episodes for season two.

The move paid off. GA beat CSI in the ratings for the 18-49 demographic and overall viewers. For the fall opener, GA had 25.14 M and CSI had 22.04 million viewers. GA had an increase in viewers from the previous season opener (18.98 million) and CSI had a decrease in viewers from the previous season debut (29 million). ABC experienced Thursday night success for the first time since its 2000 quiz-show hit Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? The suc-

152 Ibid.
cess of new shows *Ugly Betty*, *Brothers & Sisters* (2006-2011), and *Men In Trees* (2006-2008) in the 2006-07 season along with *Grey’s Anatomy*’s successful efforts while pitted against *CSI*, was enough to help ABC move to second place in adults 18-49.153

The next year, ABC attempted to duplicate GA’s ratings success with the launch of a GA spinoff, *Private Practice* (2007- ). Rhimes came up with the idea for a spinoff during GA’s third season and pitched the idea to McPherson. McPherson loved the idea, and Rhimes used an episode near the end of season three as a backdoor pilot for *Private Practice*. In the GA episode, Dr. Addison Montgomery visits old friends from medical school in California. Most of the episode focuses on her vacation away from Seattle Grace Hospital. Rhimes wrote the GA episode and the first episode of *Private Practice*. The fall 2007 launch of *Private Practice* focused on Dr. Addison Montgomery’s move from Seattle to a new practice, Oceanside Wellness, in California. The network put *Private Practice* in between two new dramas, *Pushing Daisies* (2007-2009) and *Dirty Sexy Money* (2007-2009). *Variety* called the Wednesday night experiment the biggest risk of the season.154 According to *Media Week*, this was the first time in over 25 years that ABC risked placing three new shows on one night.155 It proved to be another successful risk: the lineup was number one with adults 18-49 and *Private Practice* was a highly ranked show among women 18-34 and 18-49.156

Also during this season, the Writers Guild of America went on strike from November 5, 2007 to February 12, 2008. The broadcast networks thus had a limited number of new episodes, with production ceasing once the strike was declared. This annihilated the development season and all broadcast networks cut back on development costs. NBC skipped ordering pilots and

---

154 Schneider, "ABC: Frosh-Heavy Sked Crystalizes in Wednesday Revamp."
went straight to ordering series. The CW ordered new series sight unseen. For its part, ABC reduced the number of script commissions and pilots shot, even postponing shooting any pilots until after the May upfronts (Most pilots are normally completed by May).\(^\text{157}\)

The writer’s strike had some interesting effects on the fall 2008 prime-time lineup. For ABC, it was the first time in years the network did not have the most new shows. In the chaos of trying to finish the 2007-08 television season with new episodes once the strike was over, ABC elected to essentially postpone some of its series. It stopped production of *Private Practice*, *Pushing Daisies*, and *Dirty Sexy Money* for 2007-08, but renewed them for the 2008-09 season.

By 2008, the network had built a reputation for its female-skewing lineup.\(^\text{158}\) McPherson readily acknowledged the importance of female-skewing programs stating: “I believe women drive television viewing as a whole. A lot of what we developed . . . was with women 18-49 in mind. Women viewers have been a major reason for ABC’s rebirth. We still want to reach a broad audience, but I believe that if we target women, along the way men will come as well.”\(^\text{159}\) *GA* was also a very popular show for women 18-34 and by 2007 ranked as the number one show for women 18-34 and 18-49.\(^\text{160}\) *Private Practice* also brought women 18-34 and 18-49 to ABC


\(^{159}\) Consoli, “Scent of a Woman,” 7.

on Wednesday nights. Shonda Rhimes had created two series that attracted this audience to the broadcast network.\textsuperscript{161}

The 2009-2010 season marked ABC’s comeback in comedy. As previously mentioned, ABC was known for its successful sitcoms but had failed to recapture that success in the 2000s.\textsuperscript{162} From 2000-2004, the network had moderate success with family comedies \textit{My Wife & Kids, According to Jim}, and \textit{George Lopez}. These shows lasted several seasons but were not breakthrough hits like \textit{Lost} or \textit{Desperate Housewives}. From 2005-2009, the network unsuccessfully launched new sitcoms such as \textit{Freddie} (2005), \textit{Hot Properties} (2005), \textit{Knights of Prosperity} (2006), \textit{Samantha Who?} (2007-2009), \textit{Cavemen} (2007), and \textit{Carpoolers} (2007).

In fall 2009, Wednesday evenings on ABC started with a two-hour comedy block. The shows in the comedy block had familiar sitcom stars: Kelsey Grammer (\textit{Hank}, 2009), Patricia Heaton (\textit{The Middle}, 2009- ), Ed O’Neill (\textit{Modern Family}, 2009- ), and Courteney Cox (\textit{Cougar Town}, 2009- ). The ratings and critical successes of \textit{The Middle}, \textit{Modern Family}, and \textit{Cougar Town} resulted in the start of a revival of the sitcom on ABC.

By 2010, the network’s most successful series remained aging dramas. Two shows that were instrumental in the revitalization of ABC in 2005, \textit{Desperate Housewives} and \textit{Grey’s Anatomy}, started their seventh seasons. \textit{Brothers & Sisters} started its fifth season, and \textit{Private Practice} started its fourth season. After \textit{Desperate Housewives}, \textit{Lost}, and \textit{Grey’s Anatomy}’s launch during the 2004-05 season, the network had not been successful in finding three successful new dramas in the same season. The 2007 launch of \textit{Pushing Daisies}, \textit{Dirty Sexy Money}, and \textit{Private Practice} looked promising, but the strike limited their first season to less than 10 episodes each.

\textsuperscript{161} This was a presumed mainstream (i.e., white) female audience.
\textsuperscript{162} For more information see Ben Grossman, "Relax, the Cavalry Is Here," \textit{Broadcasting & Cable}, April 12 2010; Marisa Guthrie, "ABC: Laughing Again," \textit{Broadcasting & Cable}, May 17 2010; Michael Malone, "Shakeup in ABC 'Family'," \textit{Broadcasting & Cable}, August 2 2010.
*Pushing Daisies* and *Dirty Sexy Money* did not find more viewers in their second seasons. ABC canceled both programs in December 2007. *Broadcasting & Cable* suggested ABC concentrate on “rebuilding comedy and restocking the drama shelves.” McPherson said that two of the network’s priorities were “attack 10 o’clock” and “stock the comedy coffers.” ABC looked to build on its sitcom success in fall 2010 with a fourth sitcom for its Wednesday night comedy block. ABC finally found a successful procedural with *Castle* (2009- ), a midseason replacement during the 2008-09 season. The procedural about a mystery writer who unofficially works with the NYPD to solve crimes aired on Monday evenings after *Dancing With the Stars* (2005- ).

From 2005-2010, ABC went from a network known for its family comedies and being in fourth place in the ratings to a network in second place in the ratings and known for its dramatic programming. *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Lost*, and *Desperate Housewives* were crucial in the network’s transformation during this period. In addition, reality shows such as *The Bachelor*, *Wife Swap*, *Supernanny* (2005-2010), and *Extreme Makeover Home Edition* helped make the network popular with female viewers. For most of this period, ABC struggled with sitcoms. *Samantha Who?* only lasted two seasons. Only as the decade concluded did the ratings success of *The Middle*, *Modern Family*, and *Cougar Town* give ABC a boost in comedy.

*Grey’s Anatomy* and its creator/executive producer Shonda Rhimes were vital to ABC’s rise out of last place among the big four. Steve McPherson described the show’s importance: “*Grey’s* has been one of the cornerstones of (ABC’s) turnaround.” During its second season, the hospital drama was the number one program for viewers 18-49. This demographic is highly sought after by advertisers. *GA* was ABC’s highest priced show for advertisers and the highest priced show on all the broadcast networks (excluding sports). In 2008, a 30-second spot during

163 Guthrie; Marisa Guthrie, "Being Upfront About Their Chances," *Broadcasting & Cable*, May 17 2010
164 Guthrie, "ABC: Laughing Again.;" Guthrie, "Being Upfront About Their Chances."
165 Dawn.
GA cost advertisers $419,000. According to Hollywood Reporter, GA was “a zeitgeist phenomenon at a time when dwindling audiences and fragmented viewership have all but declared that impossible.” The Lost-Desperate Housewives-Grey’s Anatomy trifecta was important for ABC, but GA outperformed the other two in the ratings game. GA was also the only show within the trio to have a spinoff. Although Private Practice did not pull in as many viewers as GA, it performed well for the network. The 2007 Private Practice series premiere brought in 14.2 million viewers. In fall 2007, GA started its fourth season and had 20.5 million viewers during the live broadcast. In September 2010, the seventh season of GA began with 14.0 million viewers. Although the show does not bring in as many viewers as it did in previous seasons, the show still did well in the 18-49 demographic. For the week of the September premiere, the show was number two for viewers 18-49. In addition to attracting adults 18-49, the show ranks highly among women 18-49 and 18-34. As of this writing, both shows are still on the air, and in April 2012, ABC launched a third Shonda Rhimes series, Scandal (2012- ).

From 2005-2010, ABC straddled an awkward line in which it depended on an African American public creative figure who produced a multiracial show, which was celebrated in the diversity discourse, but struggled to sustain a mass (white) audience. However, one only needs

167 Ibid.
168 Dawn.
173 Weisman.
to look at ABC’s scheduling from 2005-2010 to see that the network used its ensemble cast dramas as window dressing for diversity onscreen thus avoiding the discussion of diversity behind the scenes. Not only did Shonda Rhimes provide ABC with two successful hit series but she also became the poster child for diversity at ABC. In the discourse about the lack of diversity behind the scenes on the broadcast networks, ABC is cited as one of the few networks making a difference because the broadcast network has Rhimes and GA.\footnote{While other shows such as \textit{Lost} or \textit{Ugly Betty} were praised for diverse representations onscreen, \textit{GA} has been presented as the gold-standard because of Rhimes. Not only does ABC have a hit series with a diverse cast (\textit{GA}) but also the show has diversity off-screen with its black creator and executive producer (Rhimes).} However, Rhimes was the only African American creator and executive producer with a program on ABC from 2005-2010. Yet Rhimes’s success with \textit{GA} and \textit{PP} did not result in an increase in African Americans in positions of power on shows that air on ABC.\footnote{While critics praised \textit{GA} for its onscreen diversity, Rhimes has elided discussions about race in interviews from 2005-2010. During this period, she mostly downplayed the significance of \textit{GA} and being the first African American woman to create and executive produce two hour-long broadcast network dramas as well as the fact that she was the only African American executive producer on an ABC show. I will explore the topic of race and how Rhimes addresses it her image as a public creative figure in the next chapter.}

African Americans are part of the ensemble casts of \textit{GA} and \textit{Private Practice}, but more importantly, Rhimes’s race allowed ABC to be lauded in any discussions about the lack of diversity on the broadcast networks. ABC and its multicultural ensemble cast dramas are cited as examples of diversity in action. The success of \textit{Lost} and \textit{GA} as multicultural ensemble cast dramas gave ABC a “pass.” With the exception of 2008, ABC was the broadcast network that launched the most new shows each fall. One programming strategy ABC did not try from 2005-2010 was launching a black-oriented show. \textit{Lost}, \textit{Private Practice}, and \textit{GA} are black-featured shows in which African Americans are part of the show’s narrative, but not the main focus. One of the few sitcom hits ABC had in the 2000s was \textit{My Wife and Kids}, a black-oriented sitcom starring Damon Wayans. Yet, the network did not try another black-oriented sitcom in its attempts to
find a sitcom hit from 2005-2010. In fact, from 2005-2010, The CW was the only broadcast network to have more than one black-oriented show on its prime-time schedule.

2.2.2 The CW

From 2005-2010, The CW became a broadcast network and spent its first few years trying to create an identity. In 2006, The WB and UPN merged into one broadcast network, The CW. Unlike ABC, The CW initially utilized black-oriented programming as a programming strategy to appeal to The WB/UPN’s existing African American viewers and young white urban viewers and to attract new ones. However the network slowly shifted from depending on black viewers to moving away from them. By 2010, The CW would be well established as the fifth broadcast network, appealing to younger female viewers with hour-long dramas. To understand The CW’s development, a brief history of The WB and UPN is needed.

In 1995, Viacom and Warner Bros. further crowded the landscape of broadcast television. Paramount launched UPN and Warner introduced The WB as broadcast networks. In 1995, the FCC eliminated the financial interest and syndication rules (fin-syn), a move that allowed the broadcast networks to have more control in the ownership, production, and syndication of programs. During fin-syn, Warner and Paramount provided the broadcast networks with programming. The end of fin-syn gave Warner and Paramount the opportunity to create their own outlets to showcase their programs.176 Both networks followed in Fox’s footsteps by utilizing black-oriented sitcoms to attract African American viewers and younger white viewers. By 1995, black-oriented sitcoms had disappeared from Fox’s lineup and UPN and The WB filled that programming gap with shows such as Moesha (UPN), The Parkers (UPN, 1999-2004), The Jamie

---

Foxx Show (The WB), and The Steve Harvey Show (The WB, 1996-2002). The WB scheduled its black-oriented shows on Sunday evenings while UPN used Monday evenings. Although the shows on both evenings never made it to the top 25 most-watched broadcast network shows, they were the top ranked shows in African American households.\(^{177}\)

By 2000, both networks were struggling in the ratings. The WB and UPN attracted younger viewers, but the younger audience was not large enough.\(^{178}\) From 2002 to 2005, The WB declined in ratings consistently.\(^{179}\) UPN, while increasing slightly in ratings from its inception, did not fare much better. Both Viacom and Warner Bros. looked for a solution to their ratings woes. The two companies decided to enter a joint venture to resolve their difficulties. In January 2006, they announced their decision to merge UPN and The WB into one network: The CW.\(^{180}\) Media Week described the merger “as one of the biggest events to occur in broadcast television since the two networks formed separately.”\(^{181}\)

The WB-UPN merger made sense because both networks were going after the same demographic: viewers 18-34. The result was that this sizable audience was divided between the two networks, which resulted in low ratings for both broadcast networks. This group was “a high style demographic that advertisers lust after.”\(^{182}\) UPN’s original target demographic was young males with shows such as WWE Smackdown (1999-), Star Trek: Voyager (1995-2001),


\(^{178}\) Lowry, "Merger Puts UPN and Frog in a Blender."


\(^{182}\) Sheree Curry, "'America's Next Top Model'," TelevisionWeek, June 20 2005.
Enterprise (2001-2005), a reboot of The Twilight Zone (2002-2003) and Jake 2.0 (2003-2004). However, by 2005, UPN was going after female viewers in the same age range. Dawn Ostroff played a major role in UPN’s transition to female-skewing programs. In 2002, Ostroff became president of entertainment at UPN. She was recruited by Les Moonves, the head of CBS, to help pull the network out of last place in the ratings. As executive vice president for entertainment at Lifetime, Ostroff had been instrumental in developing original programming that delivered ratings (and female viewers) to the basic cable network.183

When Ostroff took over, the broadcast network had an incoherent prime-time schedule. On Monday evenings, the network aired a two-hour black-oriented sitcom block. Tuesday evenings were devoted to supernatural shows Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003) and Haunted (2002). Wednesday evenings had a science fiction theme with Enterprise and Twilight Zone. WWE Smackdown aired for two hours on Thursday nights, and Friday nights did not contain any original programming.184

Under Ostroff’s leadership, UPN started to transform itself with programs that primarily targeted younger female viewers (e.g., America’s Next Top Model, Veronica Mars, 2004-2007). Yet these shows were going up against popular shows on The WB such as One Tree Hill (2003-2012) and Gilmore Girls (2000-2007). America’s Next Top Model played an important role in the UPN’s transition to female-skewed programming. The show debuted May 20, 2003, the same evening Buffy the Vampire Slayer ended its series run. In its first cycle, the series averaged three million viewers and had an immediate impact on UPN viewership. According to Variety, ANTM was responsible for increasing 18-49 viewers on the broadcast network by eight per-

---

cent. By 2005, UPN would beat The WB in the adults 18-49; Variety gave ANTM credit for pulling UPN out of last place. According to TelevisionWeek, Tyra Banks made ANTM a success: “(Banks) got very involved, not only hosting but producing a show that has helped the struggling network build a new beachhead among younger female viewers.” ANTM was the most-watched show on UPN, and helped pull the network out of last place in the ratings. Yet female viewers were being divided between UPN and The WB, and both networks could not compete with the big four in the ratings game. For example, during the 2004-05 season, the average audience for CBS was 12.9 million viewers; ABC averaged 10.0 million viewers. According to Variety, UPN and The WB averaged three million viewers each. With the merger, the best shows from both networks would transition to The CW and not have to compete against each other for the younger female audience.

With the upfronts in May 2006, Ostroff, the new president of entertainment for The CW, only had a few months to plan the fall schedule. Her biggest task involved deciding which The WB and UPN shows would make the transition. The WB shows 7th Heaven (1996-2007), Gilmore Girls, One Tree Hill, Smallville (2001-2011), and Supernatural were part of the new The CW lineup. America’s Next Top Model, All of Us, Everybody Hates Chris, Girlfriends, and Veronica Mars were UPN’s contributions. The CW also added two new series to its fall prime-

---

186 Christopher Lisotta, "Tyra Banks," TelevisionWeek, January 10 2005, 49.
188 Kissell, "Now for the Big Finish.

Before the merger, UPN’s prime-time schedule included two evenings devoted to black-oriented programming. On Monday evenings, viewers watched *One on One* (2001-2006), *All of Us*, *Girlfriends*, and *Half & Half*. The Thursday night lineup started with *Everybody Hates Chris* followed by *Eve* (2003-2006), *Cuts* (2005-2006), and *Love, Inc.* (2005-2006). According to *Media Week*, black-oriented shows appealed primarily to African American and Hispanic audiences. The trade publication stated that the decision to eliminate half of these shows in 2006 with The CW’s arrival left an estimated $100 million in ad dollars available to other outlets.190 The CW scheduled its black-oriented lineup (*Girlfriends, The Game, Everybody Hates Chris, and All of Us*) on Sunday evenings, which had been a popular night for black-oriented shows on The WB.191 Ostroff claimed these shows would perform well on Sunday because this was a popular viewing time for families. However, the shows had to go up against football on NBC.192 The CW quickly realized that even if Sunday night was family viewing night, these shows could not compete against the NFL on NBC. By October, The CW moved the Sunday night shows to Monday.193

The CW kept *Everybody Hates Chris, The Game*, and *Girlfriends* on Monday evenings, which had been the night for black-oriented programs on UPN. For fall 2007, the network added a fourth sitcom to the Monday night block, *Aliens in America* (2007-2008), about a white family

190 Anthony Crupi and John Consoli, “Post-UPN, Ethnic Grps Are in Play BET and TV One Will Duke It out with Mtv, Fox, Syndication and Broadcast for $100 Million,” *Media Week*, April 10 2006.
192 Allison Romano, ”The CW Picks and Chooses,” *Broadcasting & Cable*, May 22 2006.
that hosts an international student from Pakistan. This was the netlet’s attempt at branching out from only black-oriented sitcoms. The CW comedy block went up against the highly rated CBS (which co-owns The CW) comedy block of *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-), *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-), *Two and a Half Men* (2003-), and *Rules of Engagement* (2007-). While all of the CBS shows made it to the 2008-09 season, The CW shows were not as lucky. *Aliens* was not renewed for a second season, and the network also ended *Girlfriends* after eight seasons. *Everybody Hates Chris* and *The Game* survived only one more year.

From 2006-2010, The CW continued to doggedly pursue shows that would appeal to the 18-34 demographic. Ostroff had high hopes for The CW, stating that “We’re looking ahead, focusing on the future, and creating new hits that will further define our young adult audience. . . We want to be the entertainment destination for young adults.” The CW had hits (*Gossip Girl*, 2007-; *90210*, 2008-; *Vampire Diaries*) and misses (*Reaper*, 2007-2009; *Privileged*, 2008-2009; *Melrose Place*, 2009-2010, *Stylista*, 2008) in creating a network destination for the 18-34 demographic.

A successful move in this direction was to make *America’s Next Top Model* the lead-in for its new series *Gossip Girl* in 2007. *ANTM* was the most stable show for The CW at the time. It was the first show to air on The CW in 2006 and continued to be the broadcast network’s highest rated series. On Wednesday nights, *ANTM* either won its time slot for women 18-34 or came in second place (after *American Idol*). *ANTM* remained The CW’s highest rated show until 2009, when *Vampire Diaries* took the top position at the network. The *ANTM* lead-in was a successful strategy for the network. *ANTM*’s stability along with the success of

---

Gossip Girl in 2007 started The CW on the right track for programming targeted to young women. Not only did the show perform well in the ratings during its on-air broadcast, but the show also sold well on iTunes.197

Providing content through the iTunes store was one method The CW used to reach the 18-34 year-old demographic. In 2006, the network also used MySpace to promote its launch. The CW was the first network to use the social networking site to advertise its programming. By 2007, the network was streaming eight shows on its own website and made its programming available on multiple digital platforms such as Video-on-Demand and mobile phones. The network saw continued growth in viewers watching The CW’s shows on these platforms.198 Gossip Girl was a top-ten staple on iTunes and one of The CW’s most-watched shows on their website.199

However, a conundrum emerged in the network’s play for younger viewers. The demographic is coveted but also hard to track. Younger viewers watched The CW’s shows, but for the most part, they were not watching them using a television or during the shows' live broadcasts. The CW discovered that its shows performed well on other platforms, such as mobile devices and computers.200 This is problematic because advertisers typically still prioritize the numbers of

---

197 Reaper, a one-hour drama about a young man who works for the devil collecting souls that have escaped from hell also performed well on iTunes. Michael Schneider and Josef Adalian, "Can CW Spread 'Gossip' Mojo?,” Variety, November 26- December 2 2007.


199 Josef Adalian and Michael Schneider, "Nets Play the Rating Game," Variety, October 8-14 2007; Grego and Guthrie, "Lessons of the Fall."

viewers consuming the live linear broadcasts of a program. The CW actually removed *Gossip Girl* from its webpage hoping that it would result in a significant increase in live viewing. The network discovered that the fans watching it online did not want to watch it live and began illegally downloading the series, and the live viewing numbers only increased marginally. The CW ended up putting the show back online. Ostroff claimed that as of 2010 The CW’s DVR ratings were higher than its live broadcast ratings.

In spring 2008, The CW started its transition to becoming a female-skewing network. The network moved *Everybody Hates Chris, The Game*, and a re-broadcast of *ANTM* to the no-man’s land of Friday nights, as UPN holdover *WWE Smackdown* moved to MyNetworkTV. Also for the 2008-09 season, The CW launched its new programs before the other networks. The CW took another page from the Fox scheduling playbook by rebooting the popular ‘90s Fox drama *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000); The CW reboot even featured some of the original cast members.

The CW could not repeat similar success with the strategy of using its flagship show, *ANTM*, as a lead-in for *Stylista*, a reality show in which contestants compete to be the assistant for the fashion news director of *Elle* magazine. Also executive-produced by Tyra Banks, *Stylista* lasted only one season. Lastly, the network moved *Gossip Girl* from Wednesday nights to Monday nights; the show continued to perform well in the ratings for the network in live broad-

---


202 Grego and Guthrie, "Lessons of the Fall."

203 This is very different from ABC. For ABC, DVR ratings boost a show’s live broadcast ratings. Grego, "How The CW Stays Undead."; Melissa Grego, "Ostroff on Growing up Fast," *Broadcasting & Cable*, February 1 2010; Grego and Guthrie, "Lessons of the Fall."; Kissell, "Young CW Puts Brand into Focus."

casts, online viewings, and iTunes downloads. By the end of the decade, GG became more important than ANTM in The CW’s branding and promotion.

In addition to making content available on multiple platforms, which is part of the freedom provided for programmers in the emerging post-network era, the network also used marketing campaigns designed to appeal to a younger demographic. For the 2009-10 season, The CW promoted its prime-time lineup with the “WTF” (Watch This Fall) campaign. The CW designed the “WTF” campaign to appeal to its younger demographic. The network previously had success with the OMFG campaign to promote Gossip Girl (WTF and OMFG are abbreviations used in text messaging and email). The OMFG campaign included commercials and print advertisements with racy shots of the cast. The CW defended the campaign amid criticism, stating that “We wanted to create a provocative campaign that stands out from the competition and reminds viewers of some of the OMG moments that have made ‘Gossip Girl’ one of the most buzzed-about new shows on television . . . This sexy, sophisticated campaign speaks directly to our adult 18-34 viewers using expressions that are part of their lexicon.”

Spring 2009 marked the end of sitcoms on The CW. More importantly, the end of sitcoms on The CW signaled a major turning point for black-oriented shows on the broadcast networks. In February 2009, the network announced that it would no longer have a comedy development division. No comedy meant that there would be no black-oriented shows on The CW. A few months later, they announced that Everybody Hates Chris and The Game would not be renewed for another year. Instead, the network planned to focus on one-hour dramas and reality programs. Broadcasting & Cable called the elimination of these sitcoms the network’s biggest

---

205 Kissell, "Young CW Puts Brand into Focus."
206 See Goetzl; Learmonth, "CW Plots Rookie Season."
207 WTF= What the Fuck, OMFG= Oh My Fucking God.
risk for the 09-10 fall season. However, Variety thought the decision was a smart move for the network; shows such as Gossip Girl, ANTM, and 90210 were helping The CW create an identity as a network for younger (white) female viewers.

The success of 90210 led The CW to attempt a second ‘90s drama reboot with Melrose Place (which was a spinoff of the original Beverly Hills 90210, Fox 1990-2000). Two 90s reboots proved to be too many for the young network. Melrose Place lasted only one season. In addition to Melrose Place, The CW aired two other new dramas: The Beautiful Life (2009) and Vampire Diaries. Vampire Diaries was the only new show on The CW’s prime-time lineup to make it to a second season. The Beautiful Life faced stiff competition from Fox’s new show Glee (2009-) on Wednesday nights. Although Melrose Place had 90210 as its lead-in, the drama did not perform as well as 90210. Vampire Diaries grew to be the network’s most popular new show for The CW, with 2-3 million viewers watching the live broadcasts as of 2010.

As of 2010, The CW continued to be last place in the ratings, but its prime-time lineup held strong appeal for young white women. By programming shows that appealed to younger viewers, The CW created a channel that these viewers consumed across multiple platforms such as mobile phones, tablets, and online. From 2006-2010, The CW continued to focus on honing in on one key target demographic, viewers 18-34 (especially women), an audience that had been underserved by the other broadcast networks. The biggest challenge for the network was in competing with the big four. Although ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox attracted more viewers and programmed shows that appealed to a larger demographic, production costs were the same across

209 Guthrie, “The CW: New Year, New Focus.”
210 On The CW, black urban life was replaced by white suburban/upper-class life. After the cancelation of the black-oriented sitcoms, diversity on The CW remained limited to supporting characters with the exception of ANTM, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapters Three and Four. Kissell, "Young CW Puts Brand into Focus."
211 For more information about ratings for Vampire Diaries see TV by the Numbers, http://www.tvbythenumbers.com.
212 Guthrie, "Being Upfront About Their Chances."
all the networks.\textsuperscript{213} The CW supplemented the losses from production costs with compensation from affiliates.\textsuperscript{214} *ANTM*, as a reality show, did not cost nearly as much as the hour long dramas on The CW; thus ensuring its longevity.\textsuperscript{215} The continued popularity of *ANTM* and its cheaper production budget made it a valuable commodity for The CW. In addition, *ANTM* had additional revenue streams. It is syndicated in 110 countries and 15 countries have their own version (e.g., *Germany’s Next Top Model*, 2006-; *Australia’s Next Top Model*, 2005-; *Canada’s Next Top Model*, 2006-2009).\textsuperscript{216}

From 2006-2010, the network also shifted its focus to mostly hour-long dramas such as *Gossip Girl*, 90210, and *Vampire Diaries*, which brought in women 18-34 to the network. *America’s Next Top Model* remained The CW’s most popular reality show, but the network was not able to premiere a new reality program with the ratings success of *ANTM*. Yet each year, The CW saw an increase its 18-34 viewership.\textsuperscript{217} By focusing on this demographic, The CW created a space on the broadcast networks for advertisers looking to precisely target this coveted demographic. Although Ostroff talked about broadening The CW’s schedule, she acknowledged that “[18-34] is our sweet spot and we know that’s where we can make the most noise.”\textsuperscript{218} Although perpetually last place in the ratings, The CW had the youngest audience; the average age of a viewer of The CW was 31, which was 10 years younger than the average viewer for the big four.\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{213} For more information see Jim Benson, "Is This the CW's New Reality?," *Broadcasting & Cable*, March 26 2007.
\textsuperscript{214} Grego, "How The CW Stays Undead."
\textsuperscript{215} Schneider and Adalian, "Can CW Spread 'Gossip' Mojo?"
\textsuperscript{217} Paula Hendrickson, "CW: Three-Year-Old Network Forges Ahead with Push to Cement Brand among Viewers," *Variety*, September 15 2009; Kissell, "Young CW Puts Brand into Focus."
\textsuperscript{218} Hendrickson.
The network also continued to reach younger viewers through multiple advertising platforms and provide content on multiple online outlets. The network integrated these new technologies into their advertising and marketing for shows. For example, the 2009 fall campaign claimed that The CW had shows “to text about, blog about, chat about, and tweet about.”\textsuperscript{220} By 2010, the CW had its own mobile and iPad app and used Facebook and Twitter to reach viewers. For example, on Facebook’s social networking game \textit{Sorority Life}, gamers could try out to be a Hellcat cheerleader.\textsuperscript{221}

In effect, the CW functioned as a broadcast network-cable channel hybrid. Although it started as a broadcast network appealing to younger viewers 18-34 with an ongoing appeal to African Americans, it now specifically targets women 18-34. Instead of trying to be a traditional broadcast network, The CW created a niche-broadcast network, which has been great for women 18-34 but not for African American viewers. The CW used black-oriented shows to bring African American viewers to the new network. However, once it shifted to programming geared towards women 18-34, it removed all black-oriented shows from its prime-time schedule. When the broadcast network canceled \textit{The Game}, they had a show that was being blogged about, texted about, tweeted about, and chatted about online. Fans of the show launched a massive online campaign to save the show. The cast also got involved by participating in a video, “Change the Game Campaign,” that was posted on YouTube.\textsuperscript{222} All of this was not enough to bring the show back on The CW.\textsuperscript{223}

\textsuperscript{220}Evans, “Is the Game Over for Black Television?.”
\textsuperscript{221}This is in connection with The CW’s new drama \textit{Hellcats} (2010) about college cheerleaders.
\textsuperscript{222}Evans, “Is the Game Over for Black Television?.”
Black-block counterprogramming on UPN (and for a brief period on The CW) was a good business strategy as long as it was limited to one night a week and as long as the network was establishing itself. A former UPN executive describes the strategy at the network: “The feeling was that one night of black programming is good business, more than that is not.” By 2010, there was not even one night of black-oriented programming on The CW or any other broadcast network. Although black-oriented shows attract African American younger viewers, they also bring in lower advertising rates and are perceived as “limit [ing] the network’s appeal to more mainstream (white) audiences.”

The CW’s decision to eliminate black-oriented shows from its schedule virtually eliminated black-oriented shows from the broadcast networks. However, it had a bigger impact behind the scenes. African Americans in positions of power behind the scenes have limited opportunities to work on shows other than black-oriented ones. The cancellation of The Game and Everybody Hates Chris removed the only outlet for these shows on the broadcast networks. The decline in African American writers and executive producers working on the broadcast networks started when The WB and UPN merged into The CW. According to the NAACP Hollywood Bureau, the merger resulted in “a two-thirds decline in the number of African American writers.”

Advertising Age argues that The CW has followed a cable network model to achieve success: “The CW may be a broadcaster but has a narrow focus on young women . . . Gossip Girl brings in a rabid audience. Advertisers know what they are going to get, but they also know they

225 Ibid.
aren’t getting the teeming masses.” The broadcast network has been described as a “nice niche network,” and Ostroff says programming the network for women 18-34 has been instrumental to the network’s success. Niche programming has been a successful strategy for cable networks for decades, but this strategy depends on which niche audience the cable outlet is targeting.

The broadcast versus cable distinction is an ongoing debate within the industry and trade publications. The terms are primarily used by people working in television, trade publications, and ad buyers. Broadcast and cable have always had an interdependent relationship, and these lines are even less clear now that conglomerates own both. The average television viewer does not differentiate between cable or broadcast when he or she watches television. Broadcast has always had a collective stable of shows [that] defines its current brand.

A significant difference between cable networks and broadcast networks is revenue streams. TV’s business model relies largely on advertisers to generate a profit whereas cable networks receive money from advertisers and subscription fees. Based on these distinctions, ABC and The CW are considered broadcast networks and TBS is a basic cable network.

---

227 Brian Steinberg, “Broadcast TV or Cable, It’s All the Same to Consumers,” Advertising Age, March 23 2009, 30.
231 For more information see Anderson; Hilmes.
232 Grossman, "Broadcast Goes Cable."
233 Technology is also a key point of distinction between broadcast and cable in over-the-airwaves versus wires. Broadcast still reaches more households.
Basic cable networks such as TBS and TNT claim there is no difference; most viewers do not distinguish between cable and network when they turn on a television set. Basic cable networks use this information to appeal to advertisers. A major difference between broadcast and cable is in advertising rates. Broadcast networks still receive a higher rate than cable channels for prime-time advertising. The broadcast network-cable distinction is fading away as ratings for cable reach broadcast levels due to aggressive campaigning by cable for parity and shows with higher quality production value. Also, the fragmented audience has resulted in fewer mass-audience moments. Over the past few years, broadcast networks continue to lose viewers and basic cable networks keep gaining them.

The appeal of the broadcast networks to advertisers is in reaching the largest audience possible. Even with a continued decrease in viewership, the networks generally had a larger viewing audience than basic cable channels. However, in 2009, media analyst Michael Nathanson claimed that if the current trends in viewership continue, by the 2012-2013 season broadcast networks would only have 1.5 times the reach of cable. However, as of 2010, most advertisers still utilized the broadcast networks to reach as many viewers as possible. TBS is a good example of a basic cable network that increasingly used broadcasting network strategies to increase viewership.

2.2.3 TBS

From 2005-2010, TBS transitioned from a basic cable channel that aired a variety of syndicated movies and programs to having a specific cable identity by branding itself as a cable out-

---

234 Yet this only applies to those that can afford cable and have multiple channel options. Scott Donaton, "Broadcast Nets Are Wising up About What Cable TV Teaches," Advertising Age, January 26 2004. Steinberg, "Broadcast TV or Cable, It's All the Same to Consumers." 235 Steinberg reports: “broadcast would have just one and a half times the reach of cable by the 2012-2013 season.” Steinberg, "Broadcast TV or Cable, It's All the Same to Consumers." 236 Brian Steinberg, "Why Broadcast and Cable Are Starting to Look the Same," Advertising Age (2010). http://www.adage.com (accessed May 17, 2010).

The decline of sitcoms on the broadcast networks during this period provided an opening for the basic cable channel. As discussed in the ABC section, sitcoms were in a decline on the broadcast networks and had a limited presence on the broadcast network prime-time schedule. With the exception of *Two and a Half Men*, broadcast network comedies were not the top shows in the coveted 18-49 demographic. TBS took advantage of this opportunity. Sitcoms generally attract younger viewers. The addition of reruns of *Family Guy* (Fox, 1999-2002, 2005 - ) and *The Office* brought in these younger viewers to the basic cable network. These reruns provided a launching pad for TBS’s original programming. TBS paired the 2007 launch of *House of Payne* with *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS, 1996-2005). *My Boys* aired after *Sex and the City* and *10 Items or Less* came on after *Family Guy*. Reruns of these sitcom favorites were instrumental in launching TBS’s original programming and remain the foundation of the TBS schedule.

TBS’s original comedies *10 Items or Less* and *My Boys* performed well in the ratings, but it was the 2007 launch of Tyler Perry’s *House of Payne* that started the increase of original

---

238 Before 2005, TBS had non-fictional original programming such as *Dinner and a Movie*, (1995-2011) and *Movie and a Makeover* (2003-2012) which aired during movies on TBS. *Glory Daze* and *Neighbors From Hell* were launched in fall 2010, and only lasted one season.

239 According to *Variety*, *Men* was the only comedy in the top 20 for viewers 18-49. Reality shows and procedurals dominated the top 20 for viewers in this demographic. For more information see Dempsey, ”Cable Ready to Pick up Networks' Sitcom Slack.”


scripted programs on TBS. In addition to being the most-watched original program on TBS, *House of Payne* marked the transition of black-oriented sitcoms to cable. As noted above, in 2007, there were only three black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks: The CW’s *Everybody Hates Chris, Girlfriends*, and *The Game*. Tyler Perry’s *HOP* provided African American viewers with a fourth show and new outlet to find original black-oriented shows.

Before 2002, TBS and TNT were lumped together as two Turner networks that aired syndicated television programs and movies. Both cable networks even showed the same movies. In the 2000s, Turner moved to give each network a distinct identity. From 2001 to 2002, TNT increased production of original dramas, eliminated its staple *WCW Monday Nitro* (1995-2001) wrestling program and reduced its run of movies. By 2002, it had a promotional slogan to match this move: “We Know Drama.” Turner then pursued a rebranding strategy to help forge an identity for TBS. While TNT had become the cable home of dramatic syndicated programming such as *Law & Order*, TBS would focus on comedy entertainment.

TBS had a reputation for showing syndicated sitcoms during the day, but the basic cable network wanted to expand the sitcoms into longer blocks of time. Syndicated sitcoms, such as *The Andy Griffith Show* (CBS, 1960-1968), had been part of the TBS schedule for decades. In the mid-1990s, the basic cable channel took a new direction with syndicated programming and decided to incorporate more contemporary sitcoms that were new to syndication such as *The Cosby Show, Full House, The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, Roseanne*, and *The Drew Carey Show*. In 2003, TBS launched the “Nonstop Comedy Block,” which included *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1990-1998), *Friends, Drew Carey*, and *Home Improvement*. This block of shows and other syndicated

---

sitcoms attracted viewers 18-49 to the basic cable network. In 2004, the cable network started its “Very Funny” campaign.

Once the “Very Funny” campaign launched, it took TBS two years to launch original scripted sitcoms. Contemporary sitcoms that had recently gone into syndication (Friends, Sex and the City, The Office) brought viewers to TBS, but as these syndicated programs aged, they attracted fewer viewers. TBS needed original programming to keep viewers watching and to ensure high subscription fees from MSOs. The upsurge in original programming on TBS also coincided with the rise of executive Steve Koonin. Koonin started as a general manager at TNT in 2000 and was instrumental in the “We Know Drama” campaign. In 2006, Koonin became the president of Turner Entertainment Networks. In this new position, he supervised programming on TNT, TCM, and TBS.

Before 2004, TBS had original non-scripted series Ripley’s Believe it or Not (2000-2003) and Worst Case Scenarios (2002). During this period, the cable network engaged in the reality television show craze with series such as The Real Gilligan’s Island (2004-2005), in which contestants reenacted events from the 1960s sitcom, and Minding The Store (2005), about comedian Pauly Shore running his family business, comedy club, The Store. In 2005, the basic cable channel attempted to launch a reality show that would fit in with the new image of TBS. Daisy Does America (2005) focused on British comedienne Daisy Donovan traveling around the United States performing odd jobs such as bounty hunting, wedding planning and being a dog show handler. It was not renewed for a second season.
TBS fared a little better with original scripted sitcoms. In 2006, it launched *My Boys* and *10 Items or Less*.243 *My Boys* focused on a female sportswriter and her all-male group of friends. *10 Items or Less* was a workplace comedy set in a grocery store. The December debut of *My Boys* brought in one million viewers and became the highest-rated original sitcom on basic cable at the time for viewers 18-49.244 By the end of the first season, the sitcom averaged almost two million viewers.245 *10 Items or Less* also performed well for the network, averaging between 600,000-700,000 viewers. Both sitcoms were renewed for a second season.246 It was in this wave of 2006 sitcom successes and shift to original programming that Tyler Perry found his way to the TBS network.

Before 2005, Tyler Perry attempted to expand his career from plays to television. Perry had an offer from CBS but decided to pass once he learned that the network wanted him to make significant revisions. Perry then focused on making the transition into movies. The success of *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005) and *Madea’s Family Reunion* (2006) provided Perry with a second opportunity at television. With two financially successful films, Perry had more clout and control over his next television project. This time, Perry decided to avoid the broadcast networks and try syndication. Perry was able to accomplish this with a partnership with the distribution company Debmar-Mercury. In order to have complete creative control, Perry self-financed 10 episodes of *House of Payne*. Debmar-Mercury handled the distribution costs and

243 The first TBS sitcom was *Chimp Channel* (1999), which was a parody of *Saturday Night Live* but with chimps. For more information about this short-lived sitcom see Tim Brooks and Earl Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007).
246 Downey; Martin, “TBS Gets Laff Lift.”
provided them to local networks for free in a trial run in 2006.\textsuperscript{247} The show performed well in the ratings, especially in Atlanta. TBS was made aware of Perry’s success and decided to pick up \textit{HOP}. TBS ordered 100 episodes to begin airing on the network in summer 2007. It was an unprecedented television deal: the upfront 100 episode order guaranteed automatic syndication for the sitcom.\textsuperscript{248} TBS had exclusive rights to the series for fifteen months and then the show would be available for syndication. Moreover, Perry was able to maintain complete creative control and ownership of \textit{HOP}.

On \textit{HOP}, Perry was a multi-hyphenate. He created the series, directed all 100 episodes, and served as an executive producer. The only thing Perry did not do on \textit{HOP} was write episodes, but he did come up with the storylines and narrative direction of the show.\textsuperscript{249} Perry’s involvement with \textit{HOP} starts with the show’s title: \textit{Tyler Perry’s House of Payne}. Perry’s decision to include his name in the title of the show will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

When \textit{House of Payne} premiered on TBS, the sitcom averaged 5.5 million viewers, and quickly replaced \textit{My Boys} as the highest-rated sitcom on TBS and on basic cable for viewers 18-49.\textsuperscript{250} During the second week, ratings decreased to 3.2 million viewers.\textsuperscript{251} Since 2007, the series has averaged between 2.5-3 million viewers.\textsuperscript{252} \textit{HOP}’s ratings were better than \textit{Everybody Hates Chris} and \textit{The Game}’s final seasons on The CW in 2009.\textsuperscript{253} \textit{House of Payne} turned out to


\textsuperscript{248} Dempsey, "Syndie's Sitcom Slump Socks Stations."


\textsuperscript{251} Stack.


\textsuperscript{253} Both shows had less than two million viewers per episode in their final seasons on The CW. Also \textit{HOP}’s ratings are low compared to big four shows such as \textit{Modern Family}, \textit{The Big Bang Theory}, or \textit{The Office}. For more information see http://tvbythenumbers.com.
be a wise choice for TBS; it appealed to an underserved African American audience as well as viewers of family comedies. The show attracted the 18-49 demographic and also had crossover appeal.\textsuperscript{254} House of Payne has a 40\% white audience.\textsuperscript{255} The success of House of Payne on Wednesday evenings resulted in the addition of two more black-oriented programs, Meet the Browns in 2009 and Are We There Yet? in 2010, to create a Wednesday night comedy lineup. Wednesday nights started with an hour of House of Payne at 8:00 PM followed by an hour of Meet the Browns at 9:00 PM and Are We There Yet? at 10 PM.

Meet the Browns, created and executive produced by Tyler Perry, is a televisual adaptation of his play (and film) Meet the Browns and a spinoff of House of Payne. The lead character, Mr. Brown, appeared in several episodes of House of Payne. Meet the Browns was launched the same way as HOP. Perry created ten episodes, which TBS aired in a trial run. The hour-long premiere of Meet the Browns brought in almost four million viewers.\textsuperscript{256} The 10 episodes performed well and TBS ordered an additional 90 episodes. As with HOP, Perry executive produced and directed Meet the Browns. Also during this time, TBS ordered additional episodes of HOP, and Perry continued making films. For the additional episodes of HOP, Perry brought in other African American directors for the series, and he ended up doing the same with MTB.

Are We There Yet? is also a televisual adaptation of the film Are We There Yet? In the original film, Ice Cube starred as a man adjusting to life as a newlywed and a stepfather. For the TV version, Cube served as an executive producer, and Terry Crews, from Everybody Hates Chris, took over Cube’s role. Tyler Perry was not involved with this show except that TBS used the “Tyler Perry model” to promote the show. The show started with an initial ten episode run.

\textsuperscript{254} Dempsey, "Syndies Rewrite Sitcom Script."
The success of these episodes led TBS to order an additional 90 episodes. With *Meet the Browns* and *Are We There Yet?* TBS used *House of Payne* as a lead-in.

In addition to black-oriented sitcoms, TBS created comedic programming to air after 10 PM. *Frank TV* (2007-2008) was TBS’s first attempt at launching late-night original programming. *Frank TV*, a variety show featuring comedian Frank Caliendo, was designed to bring in viewers that were not interested in watching the late night news at 11 PM. TBS also hoped to compete with Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show* (1996- ) and *Colbert Report* (2005- ). *Frank TV* lasted two seasons on TBS. In 2009, TBS filled that time slot with *Lopez Tonight* (2009-2011), a late-night talk show hosted by comedian George Lopez. In 2010, the basic cable network moved *Lopez Tonight* to the 12 AM slot to make room for the Conan O’Brien’s new talk show, *Conan* (2010- ).

During this period, TBS was not the only basic cable channel creating original comedies. In 2005, FX launched *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (2005- ), but the show was targeted at a younger (white) male demographic. Comedy Central also expanded beyond animated comedies and news parodies with *Chappelle Show* (2003-2006), *The Sarah Silverman Show* (2007-2010), *The Jeff Dunham Show* (2009), and *Mind of Mencia* (2005-08). However, TBS had more original scripted comedies than any other basic cable network. Also the TBS comedies had higher ratings than the other basic cable comedies. For example, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* achieved a series high of two million viewers during its fifth season finale in 2009. In 2009,

---

House of Payne averaged three million viewers, and Meet the Browns also averaged three million viewers during its ten episode trial run in 2009.258

TBS’s dual revenue streams allowed it to compete against the broadcast networks and to create a programming lineup similar to its broadcast counterparts.259 TBS attracted a younger audience; the original and syndicated programs brought in the 18-34 demographic.260 The average age for the basic cable channel was 38, which was 12 years younger than the big four.261 According to Advertising Age, TBS was “starting to look like an alternative-universe version of CBS or NBC.”262 This was due to TBS and TNT’s use of former NBC and CBS shows in syndication and the incorporation of original dramas on TNT and sitcoms on TBS to the prime-time weekly schedule. For example, the 2010 fall prime-time schedule on TBS was Family Guy for three hours on Monday, The Office (8-10 PM) and Family Guy (10-11 PM) on Tuesday, House of Payne (8-9); Meet the Browns (9-10); and Are We There Yet? on Wednesday, and movies on Thursday and Friday (with Family Guy or American Dad, Fox 2005-, airing after the films from 10-11).

Also interesting was TBS’s attempt to be a de facto broadcast network while The CW was trying to be a niche cable network.263 TBS wanted to be channel for comedy but it did not want to be Comedy Central. Comedy Central’s target demographic is young males, and TBS wanted to appeal to a younger but broader audience of both genders. Obviously some programs

---

258 Yet with fewer viewers Sunny has more pop culture buzz than any of Perry’s sitcoms. This could be due to the differences in the sitcoms. Perry’s shows are family friendly and not as risqué as Sunny.
259 Brian Steinberg, “Cable Nets Broadening Their Appeal While Sharpening Their Positioning,” Advertising Age, April 12 2010.
262 Steinberg, “Why Broadcast and Cable Are Starting to Look the Same.”
263 TBS’s attempt to be a de facto broadcast network does not fit into Lotz’s construct of narrowcasting in which television is “a medium that primarily reaches niche audiences.” Lotz, The Television Will Be Revolutionized, 36.
on TBS such as *Family Guy* attracted the younger male demographic. Yet TBS did make two attempts to target younger male viewers with original programming in 2010 with the shows *Glory Daze* and *Neighbors From Hell*. *Glory Daze*, set in a college fraternity house in the 1980s, was created because of the popularity of films such as *Wedding Crashers* (2005) and *Old School* (2003) that air frequently on TBS. *Family Guy* is one of TBS’s most popular syndicated programs for adults 18-49, and *Neighbors From Hell*, an animated sitcom about Satan moving next door, was TBS’s attempt at finding the next *Family Guy*. These shows were not renewed for another season. The only real success with original programming on TBS have been Perry’s *House of Payne* and *Meet the Browns*. *My Boys* started the trend of original comedic programming on TBS, but the show only lasted 49 episodes. By December 2010, TBS had aired 166 episodes of *HOP* and 132 of *MTB*.

The inclusion of original sitcoms targeted as family sitcoms and the creation of two late night talk shows demonstrate how TBS acted in some ways more and more like a broadcast network. Yet in other ways it did not. TBS did not have to fill a weekly schedule from 8-11 PM with original programming, and it still relied on movies to fill Thursday and Friday evenings. The basic cable channel also launched most of its original programming in the summer. As an act of counter-programming, family comedies such as *The Bill Engvall Show*, *House of Payne*, *Meet the Browns*, and *Are We There Yet?* provided programming missing from the broadcast networks. ABC’s successes with *Modern Family* and *The Middle* in 2009 were the first two thriving family comedies on the broadcast networks in years. However, TBS had been programming family sitcoms since 2007. Also the addition of late night talk shows *Lopez Tonight* and *Conan* made TBS’s prime-time lineup look very similar to the broadcast networks.

---

2.2.4 Broadcast Networks, Basic Cable, or just Television?

In 2007, *Broadcasting & Cable* stated that the broadcast networks looked more like the cable networks because they had become narrower and niched. The publication cited ABC as an example because of its “estrogen-heavy” shows such as *Desperate Housewives, Brothers & Sisters, Private Practice* and *Grey’s Anatomy*. The shows had led ABC to become the “Lifetime Television of broadcast television.”\(^{265}\) In addition, the publication argued that The CW was trying to become the broadcast version of MTV, “a trend defining place for America’s youth market to meet.”\(^{266}\) Two years later, *Advertising Age* declared that broadcast networks will look like basic cable networks in the near future, which can be seen in The CW’s programming strategies.\(^{267}\)

From 2005-2010, ABC and The CW utilized a cable strategy of targeting a niche audience, even as TBS applied a broadcast network strategy of scheduling programming that would appeal to a wider audience. During this period, the technological, economic, and especially programming distinctions between basic cable and broadcast became blurrier. For example, Steve Koonin, president of Turner Entertainment Networks, argued TBS is equal to broadcast networks in terms of programming. From 2005-2010, the basic cable network incorporated several hours of original programming throughout the week. The addition of *Lopez Tonight* and *Conan* provided TBS with two late night talk shows competing against *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* (NBC, 1992-2009; 2010- ) and *Late Show With David Letterman* (CBS, 1993- ).

From 2005-2010, the broadcast networks decreased the amount of original programming even as the basic cable networks increased the amount of original programming. For example,

\(^{265}\) Grossman, "Broadcast Goes Cable."

\(^{266}\) Ibid.

the broadcast networks scheduled reruns on Saturday evenings. Many predicted Friday evenings could be next as they are a popular evening for DVR playback. During this period, another major trend was the decline of the sitcom on the broadcast networks. In spring 2005, *Everybody Loves Raymond* ended its nine-year run on CBS, and NBC’s *Will & Grace* (1998-2006) finished its seventh season. Yet, there were some successful comedies on the broadcast networks. CBS did well with sitcoms on Monday night such as *How I Met Your Mother, Two and a Half Men*, and *The Big Bang Theory*. Meanwhile, in 2007, NBC brought back its Thursday night two-hour comedy block with *The Office, My Name is Earl* (2005-2009), and *30 Rock*.

The concern over the drought of sitcoms on the broadcast networks was more about the sitcom’s life after broadcast, though few journalists explicitly acknowledged this. Sitcoms perform well in syndication after their initial run on the networks. The trade publication cited four reasons for the decline of the broadcast network sitcom: an increase in competition, reality television, technology, and “the availability of niche and bite sized web-based comedy.” For example, in 2006 the broadcast network trend was serialized dramas. The shift from procedurals to serialized dramas was the result of the success of *Desperate Housewives, Lost, and Grey’s Anatomy* on ABC. During the 2005-06 television season, ABC was the only network to see an increase in viewers 18-49. As the coveted demographic, the other networks wanted to duplicate ABC’s success.

---


269 Lowry, "Webs Weight How Much to Ask of Auds While Seeking Other Ways to Prune Primetime."

270 As of this writing, *The Big Bang Theory* is now on Thursday nights on CBS.

271 From 2004- 2006, NBC only had one hour of comedy on Thursday evenings from 8:00-9:00. *The Apprentice* had the 9:00 slot from fall 2004- spring 2006. In fall 2006, *Deal or No Deal* (2005-2009), replaced *The Apprentice* in the 9:00 slot. Also during this period *ER* was in the 10:00 PM slot until its series finale in 2009. *The Office and My Name is Earl* experienced scheduling changes from 2005-2010. *My Name is Earl* originally started on Tuesday evenings but was moved to Thursday nights. *30 Rock* originally started on Tuesdays.


The emerging post-network era has the networks and cable in a state of instability in terms of programming. The business models are changing. Broadcast and cable are just trying to survive and reinvent themselves. TBS goes back and forth between wanting to be like the broadcast networks but also wanting to be an alternative to broadcast, which can be seen in its decision to include black-oriented sitcoms as part of its original programming. As noted above, this was a strategy used by Fox, The WB, and UPN to build their networks. Koonin wants TBS to become a network that can compete with the broadcast networks in terms of programming and audience reach. However, he says where TBS is different from ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox and The CW is that the basic cable network is “trying [not] to be all things to all people.”\textsuperscript{274} For Koonin, programming comedy on TBS allows the basic cable channel the opportunity to compete with the networks, but TBS does not have to include other programming forms as part of its schedule.

In the 2005-2010 period, The CW found success by behaving more like a cable channel while TBS was successful as it took on a de facto broadcast network model. ABC, meanwhile, still used a more traditional broadcast network model. Even though it looks like it is becoming the broadcast network version of Lifetime, the broadcast network still incorporates other programming forms to appeal to a wider audience. Further, its shows primarily placed white performers in lead roles. Although most of the network’s shows appeal to women, they did start to broaden their programming with the Wednesday night comedies by late in the decade.

Significantly, TBS was not the only basic cable network to expand beyond the niche model. Other cable networks expanded their programming to increase viewership. For example, SyFy, home of scripted series and movies targeted towards science fiction lovers, introduced a cooking show, \textit{Marcel’s Quantum Kitchen} (2011), starring Marcel Vigneron, a contestant from Bravo’s \textit{Top Chef} (2006- ). SyFy also licensed \textit{WWE Smackdown} for Friday nights. AMC

\textsuperscript{274} Steinberg, “Why Broadcast and Cable Are Starting to Look the Same.”
(American Movie Classics) a cable channel previously known for showing movies, transitioned into scripted series (*Mad Men*, 2007-; *Breaking Bad*, 2008-; and *The Walking Dead*, 2010-). A&E (Arts & Entertainment) included reality shows such as *Storage Wars* (2010-), *Dog the Bounty Hunter* (2004-), and *Billy the Exterminator* (2009-). These basic cable channels sought to be broader-defined cable networks. The primary reason for this is that in the 2000s, basic cable reached its limit in terms of growth. For years, these channels continued to see an increase in viewership, but from 2005-2010, they experienced what their broadcast network counterparts had been going through for decades: audience fragmentation. Yet basic cable channels have an advantage over the broadcast networks in that they do not have to schedule as much original programming.

Although programs on basic cable networks had a sizable audience and the broadcast network audience continued to decrease, many advertisers still preferred advertising on the broadcast networks. Some advertisers felt that the broadcast networks remained the best way to reach the largest number viewers at once. Yet the increase in original programming on cable allowed basic cable networks to increase their advertising rates. Scripted series such as *Nip/Tuck* (FX, 2003-2010), *The Closer* (TNT, 2005-2012), *Psych* (USA, 2006-), and *Monk* averaged at least two million viewers in 2006. For other basic cable networks, reality programming brought viewers to their networks. For example, VH1’s *Flavor of Love* was a favorite for the 18-
By 2008, shows such as *The Closer* and *House of Payne* brought millions of viewers to their respective networks. These were significant numbers for basic cable, but the highest rated show on cable was still only on par with the lowest rated shows on the broadcast networks. For example the July 2009 season six premiere of *The Closer* had seven million viewers. At the time *The Closer* was the highest rated drama on basic cable. A few months later in September, *Grey’s Anatomy* had its sixth season premiere; 17 million viewers watched the ABC drama.

Koonin believed TBS was equal to the broadcast networks in terms of programming and deserved the same rates as the big four. He claimed 60% of television viewers watched cable but cable only received 29% of the advertising dollars on television. Cable continued to receive less money for advertising than the broadcast networks. Advertising rates are based on the number of viewers the channel can deliver for an advertiser (as well as perceived value of viewers). Because the broadcast networks have a wider reach, they charged higher rates to advertisers than the basic cable networks. For example, an ad during a football game on NBC or *American Idol*, the two highest-rated programs on the broadcast networks, cost over $300,000. Although the

---

279 Ibid.
280 The gaps between cable ratings and broadcast network ratings are starting to intersect depending on the audience demographic. For example, FX’s *Sons of Anarchy* recently beat the broadcast networks in the 18-49 demographic. The October 3, 2012 episode at 10:00 PM pulled a 2.4 in this demographic. On the broadcast networks, CBS’s *Vegas* (2012-) had 2.0, while ABC’s *Private Practice* and NBC’s *Parenthood* (2010) both had a 1.6 in this demo. However, *Vegas* had the larger audience with 12.1 million viewers (*Anarchy* had 4.6 million). James Hibberd, "'Sons of Anarchy’ Ratings Beat Broadcast Networks," *Entertainment Weekly* (2012). http://www.ew.com (accessed October 7, 2012).
cable viewing audience continued to increase, the advertising rates on cable did not reflect these changes. Tim Spengler, president of the advertising and marketing firm North American Initiative, described the broadcast vs. cable advertising situation: “Advertisers use the power of television, and the bigger the audience, usually the more value it is. While advertisers sometimes take advantage of a particular niche offered by a cable show in general, advertisers are paying for size.” For many advertisers, the broadcast networks were still the best option for reaching a large audience throughout the first decade of the 2000s.

As of 2010, the industrial distinctions between broadcast and cable remained even though the broadcast networks were not the powerful force they once were. In a period of increased audience fragmentation, it would seem that a logical choice for the broadcast networks would be to include at least one black-oriented program as part of their prime-time schedules. In the emerging post-network era, diversity is limited to narratives that focus on white characters. This shows the limits of claims of “diversity” in the post-network era in multiple ways. As case studies, ABC and The CW demonstrate that diversity was limited in terms of onscreen representations. Shonda Rhimes and Tyra Banks provided both networks with much needed diversity behind the scenes. However, their success did not result in an increase in African Americans in positions of power. Also there were constraints in representations of blackness on Rhimes and Banks’s shows, which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. In the emerging post-network era, diversity onscreen should not remain intertwined with diversity behind the scenes as it was/is with black-oriented programs. As seen throughout this chapter, successful black-oriented programs attracted African American viewers as well as younger viewers, a coveted demographic for advertisers. Yet for ABC, that demographic did not align with its female-

---

285 Hampp.
skewing programs. ABC was not the only broadcast network to do this. On the broadcast networks, African Americans are part of an ensemble cast on scripted dramas (*Grey’s Anatomy*) or reality shows (*America’s Next Top Model*), but the characters of color are always secondary characters.

As for diversity in comedies on the broadcast networks, Megan Angelo (2010) claimed it “seems to hit a wall.”

Once The CW cancelled *Everybody Hates Chris* and *The Game* in 2009, black-oriented sitcoms disappeared entirely from the broadcast networks. Also the broadcast networks’ decision to decrease the number of sitcoms during prime-time and the trade press’s declarations that the sitcom was dead left an interesting opportunity for basic cable networks. Cable could fill the sitcom void left on the broadcast networks. TBS’s decision to air *House of Payne* not only filled the sitcom void but the black-oriented sitcom void that occurred when The WB and UPN merged into The CW (Kloer 2006). TBS’s Wednesday night lineup was a good start but the industrial context places limitations on diversity in terms of blackness on-screen and diversity behind the scenes. Most African Americans working off-screen remain restricted to the “black box” in that the parameters for success for blacks remain quite narrow and confined to specific restrictive forms, the black-oriented sitcom.

From 2005-2010, black-oriented sitcoms managed to find a home on basic cable but it is too soon to tell if it is a permanent home or just a temporary strategy used by these outlets to increase viewers much like the practice used by the netlets in the past. Although the emerging post-network era provides more choices in channels and types of storytelling, when it comes to racial diversity, the industry still remains very much in the multi-channel transition.

287 Angelo.
288 In fall 2009, Fox added *Brothers*, a black-oriented sitcom to its fall schedule, but the show did not last more than a few episodes.
289 For more information see Steven Zeitchik, "Having It Both Ways," Variety, July 30- August 5 2007.
2.3 Diversity in the Neo-Cosby Moment

For the 2005-06 season, UPN had eight black-oriented sitcoms scheduled in two hour blocks on Monday and Thursday evenings. The WB had removed its last black-oriented show *Steve Harvey’s Big Time Challenge* (2003-2005) in spring 2005. The only black-oriented sitcom on the big four was *The Bernie Mac Show* on Friday nights on Fox. On cable, the only black-oriented prime-time program was the BET reality show *College Hill*. In 2005, Bravo aired *Being Bobby Brown* (2005) starring singers Bobby Brown and Whitney Houston, but it was not renewed for a second season.

The biggest moment in the Neo-Cosby Moment was the merger of The WB and UPN into The CW in 2006. These two networks were responsible for most of the black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks since 1995. This merger marked the decline of black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks. More importantly, it marked the decline of African Americans working behind the scenes due to the fact that most African Americans working in television worked on these shows.

According to the WGA, before the merger (the 2005-06 season) there were 103 African American writers and most (56%) worked on writing staffs on UPN shows. The WGA stated that most African Americans in positions of power were on UPN: “There were 13 black executive producers working in television during 05-06 season and seven of them headed UPN shows.” During this season, there were 261 white executive producers. According to the WGA, African Americans still had limited room for advancement: “White writers are nearly

---

291 Ibid.
twice as likely as minority writers to be showrunners.\textsuperscript{292} The WGA did not report if the remaining 45 writers and six executive producers worked in broadcast or cable.

The WB-UPN merger reduced the number of black-oriented programs on the netlets by 50 percent. By the 2008-2009 season, only \textit{Everybody Hates Chris} and \textit{The Game} remained. These shows were not renewed for the 2009-2010 season. The WB-UPN merger left a void for black-oriented sitcoms in prime-time. This left an opening for TBS and Tyler Perry’s \textit{House of Payne} in 2007. TBS took advantage of the decline of black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks and the absence of scripted programming on BET and TV One. From 2005-2010, TV One mostly relied on movies or syndicated black-oriented sitcoms to fill their prime-time schedules.\textsuperscript{293} BET’s original programming was limited to music videos, specials, and reality shows. Both networks would not transition into more original scripted programming until 2011.

From 2005-2010, mainstream and industry publications spent more time examining the onscreen representations of blackness than they did on the lack of diversity behind the scenes. For example, \textit{Ebony} praised shows such as \textit{Grey’s Anatomy}, \textit{CSI}, and \textit{Law & Order} for their diverse casts.\textsuperscript{294} In 2006, \textit{Jet} said viewers would be glued to the TV because of all the black stars on prime-time.\textsuperscript{295} \textit{Essence} said the networks had made considerable improvements with diversity on dramas but not sitcoms.\textsuperscript{296} However, one \textit{Ebony} writer, Lynette Holloway, was concerned about the televisual landscape and that all-black casts were fading from prime-time.\textsuperscript{297} She claimed that black-oriented shows were a thing of the past “because of a widening effort by executives to appeal to a broader range of viewers in an attempt to lure more advertisers, who were

\textsuperscript{292} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{293} For more information see Fuller; Beretta E. Smith-Shomade, \textit{Pimpin’ Ain’t Easy: Selling Black Entertainment Television} (New York: Routledge, 2008).
\textsuperscript{295} "The Faces to See on Fall TV," \textit{Jet}, October 2 2006; "Minorities Are Missing in Prime-Time Sitcoms."
\textsuperscript{297} Holloway.
spending big bucks to support programs with so-called multicultural casts.” Hughes said GA was the gold standard for multicultural casts. However, some worried that the use of the multi-cultural cast would eliminate all-black casts. Debra Martin Chase, TV producer, observed of the network situation: “[network executives are] scrambling to create shows that they believe are going to reach the widest demographic possible. Often what that means is that they are not looking to shows that are ethnically based because they are afraid they are not going to get the greatest percentage of the audience.”

Variety had still another perspective about diversity on prime-time broadcast network television. The industry oriented publication felt that instead of complaining about the lack of minority representation, organizations such as the NAACP should concentrate on the positive representations on TV. The trade publication cited Ugly Betty (ABC), Heroes (NBC, 2006-2010), and Jericho (CBS, 2006-2008) as shows that “represent genuine advancements within TV toward people of color.”

The NAACP was one of the few organizations to address the problem of the decline of the black-oriented sitcom on the broadcast networks. NAACP President Bruce Gordon called the lack of diversity on sitcoms on the major four “unconscionable. This is historically where many African American actors, writers and show runners have honed their artistic skills and found meaningful employment.” Yet the NAACP acknowledged that its organizations (and other organizations/publications) needed to shift their focus from the continuous quantitative count of African American characters onscreen to diversity off-screen. Vic Bulluck, executive

---

298 Ibid.
299 Ibid., 136.
301 "Our News." "Minorities Are Missing in Prime-Time Sitcoms."
director of the NAACP Hollywood Bureau, claimed that the new focus should be “getting more senior-level producers like ‘Grey’s’ creator Shonda Rhimes.”\(^{302}\)

Both *Variety* and Bulluck’s positions about race and television highlight the issues and constraints with representations of blackness onscreen and diversity behind the scenes. *Variety*’s stance that we should focus our energy on the positive representations resorts to old school stereotyping models. Bulluck’s insistence that the industry needs more producers like Rhimes is problematic because it places the burden of representation on Rhimes (which I explore more in the next chapter). Also while more African American producers/executive producers are needed, Bulluck’s focus on a numerical goal overlooks the bigger issue, which is the larger industrial context responsible for the stagnation and regression of diversity behind the scenes.

2.4  *Conclusion: The Neo-Cosby Moment in the Multichannel Transition*

The Neo-Cosby Moment intersects with a crucial moment in the television industry and in American culture and society. In the emerging post-network era, viewers have been granted more control in where, how, and when they watch television. The post-network era also extends to programming. As seen throughout this chapter, multicultural ensemble dramas and reality shows expanded African American diversity on television, but that diversity has largely been limited to narratives that focus on white characters. Moreover, an increase onscreen did not extend to production.

In the Neo-Cosby Moment, Shonda Rhimes, Tyra Banks, and Tyler Perry are anomalies. Rhimes and Banks found success with two program forms that are not known for diversity behind the scenes. While Perry’s work behind the scenes on a black-oriented sitcom is typical for most African Americans working in positions of power on television, how he got *HOP* on the

airwaves was not typical. Perry marks a major shift in the Neo-Cosby Moment as it relates to black-oriented sitcoms. From 2005-2010, black-oriented sitcoms remained the number one program form with an African American cast and crewmembers. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are part of the Neo-Cosby moment because they represent figures providing a presence for African Americans in front/behind the scenes contributing in a limited but distinctive way across a range of genres, forms and business models.

Using Grey’s Anatomy, America’s Next Top Model, and House of Payne as case studies to examine industrial shifts from 2005-2010 on ABC, The CW, and TBS demonstrates how we remain in the multi-channel transition and are not in the post-network era in terms of representation. At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed how NBC’s The Cosby Show had an industrial and aesthetic impact. The success of TCS resulted in more black-oriented programs on television and diversity behind the scenes. Through 2010, trade publications and critics continued to refer to this show as the gold standard for representations of blackness on television. As of this writing, TCS has been off the air for almost twenty years. TCS was an important show in the history of blackness on television, but it cannot remain the standard we use to discuss representation of blackness onscreen or lack of diversity in the industry. The Neo-Cosby Moment allows us to move forward while acknowledging the importance of TCS (and Cosby).

As this chapter has suggested, we need a new lens to examine the impact of the industrial context on representations onscreen and behind the scenes. During the Cosby Moment, the black-oriented sitcom was the primary outlet for African Americans in leading roles on television. In the Neo-Cosby Moment, black-oriented sitcoms still maintain this position but changes in programming forms have increased African American visibility onscreen through the multicultural cast on ensemble dramas and reality shows. Tyler Perry, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyra
Banks are three successful case studies to demonstrate that we are in a Neo-Cosby Moment. Perry’s show represents the black-oriented sitcom, Banks covers reality television, and Rhimes is the quintessential example of most representations on broadcast networks: the multicultural ensemble cast.

In the Cosby Moment, there was an increase in diversity onscreen and behind the scenes. The same cannot be said in the Neo-Cosby Moment. The success of Rhimes, Perry, and Banks has not resulted in a significant increase in diversity behind the scenes. Shonda Rhimes remains the only African American woman to have created and executive produced two dramatic series on broadcast network television. The success of *Grey’s Anatomy* did not result in other networks taking chances on projects by other African American women working in the industry. African American representation on reality shows continues to increase but behind the scenes most of these shows are executive produced by whites. Perry’s success on TBS resulted in an increase in black-oriented sitcoms in a limited fashion on cable but not the broadcast networks. For example, ABC found a successful comedy lineup with the white-led *The Middle, Cougar Town,* and *Modern Family* on Wednesday nights. For two seasons, they struggled to find a fourth comedy for the two-hour block. Given Perry’s success on TBS on the same evening, ABC could have taken a chance on a black-oriented sitcom but they did not. Furthermore, the fact that the lack of diversity behind the scenes remains an issue indicates that we are not in a post-racial moment either. In order to better understand why Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are anomalies in the industry and why they are important figures in the Neo-Cosby Moment, it is useful to look at the impact their roles as public creative figures plays in the success of their programs, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
3 THE POWER OF THE PUBLIC CREATIVE FIGURE AND THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

3.1 Introduction

I knew if I put every element in to that television show that I knew worked, including Jesus, it would work. And it did. 303 - Tyler Perry

I take what I do on 'Top Model' and my connections to modeling very seriously . . . It means a lot to me that I've been able to show modeling as more than just a fantasy world. 304 - Tyra Banks

I knew that the show was good. I assumed that if I wanted to watch the show, others would want to watch it. 305 - Shonda Rhimes

In the above quotes, Perry, Banks, and Rhimes talk about their visions for House of Payne, America’s Next Top Model, and Grey’s Anatomy. As discussed in the previous chapter, all three are anomalies in television: three successes in an industry in which there are few African Americans in these positions of power. These industrial conditions also have influenced how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry present themselves as the creators and executive producers for ANTM, GA, and HOP. In the late stages of the multi-channel transition, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s personas as public creative figures are another outlet for promoting and publicizing their shows. Because of the limited opportunities for African Americans in positions of power, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s images as public creative figures carry the burden of representation. This chapter explores how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry address being public creative figures in the media. Working hard and being in control are central to their image as a public creative figure.

303 Albiniak, "Once He Got Going, Nothing Could Stop Him."
304 Richmond, "Brains Behind Beauty."
305 Fonseca.
As previously discussed in Chapter One, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are not stars but personalities because of their presence behind the scenes. The term public creative figure is useful to examine images of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s personalities because of the increase in individuals working behind the scenes gaining more attention in the media, especially executive producers. Over the past two decades, there has been a shift in the amount of coverage of individuals working behind the scenes. Roberta Pearson (2007) claims that authorship of a television program is now widely associated with the executive producer. These figures are viewed in the same vein as film auteurs. The creative figure has carved a space for himself/herself in the public eye. This figure now often receives as much attention as the stars of the program.

By examining their images as personalities, we can understand how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are presented as key creative figures for *ANTM, GA,* and *HOP.* However, unless one goes behind the scenes and directly observes what occurs, we cannot truly know if the individual actually performs these responsibilities. What I label “public creative figure” allows us to examine how perceived control and power during production is an important part of the construction of their television personalities. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry- and other such individuals (e.g., Dick Wolf, Aaron Sorkin, J.J Abrams, Matthew Weiner) - are perceived to be in control of the fate(s) of characters on their series, the narrative direction of the show, and other key decisions. However, their jobs also involve putting out successful television programs, which typically result in a profit for major corporations. When I speak of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as agents of their image, I acknowledge that there many others are involved in this image construction including talent agents, managers, publicity teams, personal assistants, etc. My use of “they” is shorthand for all the individuals in charge of their image construction and maintenance.

---

The term public creative figure adds a new contextual layer to the examination of stars and celebrities. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are worthy of examination because of the increase in the star image of the public creative figure. This chapter uses interviews from mainstream, niche magazines and industry publications as well as emails to fans, blog posts, and tweets from Banks, Rhimes, and Perry to see how they construct themselves as public creative figures. Examining their images as public creative figures is another means of examining race and representation on television. This approach goes beyond examining onscreen representation and provides insight into the individuals responsible for them. It is especially useful for my case studies because it allows me to examine how they present themselves as the ones in charge behind the scenes.

Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are responsible for three of the most popular shows of the 2000s for The CW, ABC, and TBS. As public creative figures, they work hard at maintaining their image as the ones in control of the production process. All three utilize publicity and online technologies in their image construction. Each uses these methods in different ways to build and sustain their images. Banks uses these technologies to prove that she is a key creative figure on America’s Next Top Model. Rhimes demonstrates her power as a public creative figure by answering fan questions and talking about production on Grey’s Anatomy. Perry, meanwhile, creates an image in which he is in control during production as a director and executive producer. One aspect that all three have in common in their images as public creative figures is the way race, specifically blackness, plays a role in their images as television personalities. Industrial conditions have shaped their personas as public creative figures. As three of the few African American creators and executive producers currently working in the television industry, their image as a public creative figure has an additional component: the burden of representation.
Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are not only public creative figures but also black public creative figures. How Banks, Rhimes, and Perry discuss being black public creative figures embodies larger discussions of race and diversity within the television industry as well as American culture.

3.1.1 Public Creative Figures & the Neo-Cosby Moment

In the Cosby Era, Cosby was the public creative figure for TCS; he took credit for most of the decisions behind the scenes from wardrobe, to sets, and storylines. This status was not as widely discussed during the time of Cosby’s show. Scholars such as Krystal Zook (1999), Darnell Hunt (2004), and Gregory Adamo (2010) have examined important black public creative figures during the Cosby Era, but there is not much scholarship about black public creative figures in the Neo-Cosby Moment. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are perfect case studies to examine the black public creative figure in the Neo-Cosby Moment because not only did they create their shows but also they serve as executive producers of these shows. Although they were not the only African American executive producers working in television from 2005-2010, they received more media attention than any other black public creative figure during this period. For example, CSI:NY is a popular show on CBS and is part of the CSI franchise. However African American executive producer Pam Veasey does not receive nearly as much attention as Shonda Rhimes does for Grey’s Anatomy.\(^\text{307}\)

Shonda Rhimes, Tyra Banks, and Tyler Perry were three notable and distinguished individuals working in this historical moment. They shaped the direction of the Neo-Cosby Moment, especially in how they discuss being black key creative figures. Their image as public cre-

\(^{307}\) Veasey does not receive as much attention as Rhimes because she did not create CSI: NY. While it performs well in the ratings for CBS, CSI: NY is not as popular as CSI or CSI: Miami (or GA).
ative figure carries additional weight: the burden of representation. As discussed in Chapter One, the burden of representation involves the additional value and responsibility added to roles actors of color play in film or television. This same burden now applies to roles off-screen that receive media attention. As black public creative figures, race is always part of their discourse, which is something their white counterparts do not experience. Dyer (1997) argues whites do not have the burden of representation because they are:

Overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, have the central and elaborated roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard. Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves as white but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualized and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race; they’re just the human race.

Because whiteness is the default standard, race is always part of the image construction of any black public creative figure. How these individuals adopt this role in the public eye reveals why a new term, public creative figure, is necessary for examining those with power in this transitional moment in television history. It is especially useful for my case studies because it allows me to examine how they present themselves as the ones in charge behind the scenes.

3.1.2 Public Creative Figures & Control

The canonical work on examining the impact of celebrity images is Richard Dyer’s Stars. Stars play an important role because they embody ideologies about race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ethnicity which mirror values and beliefs in our society. Dyer examines the dual nature of the star’s real life and the construction of his or her star image. However, he mostly

---

309 Dyer, White: Essays on Race and Culture, 3. Also later in this chapter, I compare Banks, Rhimes, and Perry to three white showrunners: Heidi Klum, Matthew Weiner, and Steven Levitan.
310 Dyer, Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society
focuses on historical analyses of constructions of star images related to gender and sexuality. Dyer avoids race for the most part because race was not talked about in Hollywood during that time. In 2005, Su Holmes revisited Dyer’s canonical works and found that the basic tenets of star studies (i.e., stars as polysemic texts) remain a useful methodology for contemporary analyses of stars and celebrities.

In *Heavenly Bodies*, Dyer examines the theme of control in Paul Robeson, Judy Garland, and Marilyn Monroe’s star images at different points in their film careers. As Dyer notes, Robeson, Garland, and Monroe embodied the struggle over control as part of their star image. Although this dissertation does not show Banks, Rhimes, and Perry fighting for control, a key element for all three is the issue of control. Similar to Dyer’s work on Paul Robeson, Marilyn Monroe, and Judy Garland, I am examining Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry at a particular point in the construction of their image as a public creative figure. Although, Banks and Perry met with popular success before their transition into television, I am limiting my scope to their image in connection with their television shows, specifically those produced from 2005-2010. Rhimes is an interesting case study because she became a personality solely because of her shows. She is famous mainly because of the strong performance of *GA*.

Control has always been central to Perry’s image as a public creative figure—from his days on the urban theater circuit to his transition to film and then television. Before his films and television shows, Perry was a successful playwright, director, and actor. As a playwright, Perry struggled for years, self-financing his plays, until his play *I Know I’ve Been Changed* became a success in the late 1990s. As his success on the urban theater circuit continued to increase, Perry made the decision to transition into television. In 2003, he had meetings with CBS and Fox,

---

311 Dyer explores the centrality of whiteness in Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*.
312 Richard Dyer limited his scope of Robeson, Garland, and Monroe to one moment in the history of these stars’ images. He purposely confined his scope to a particular period in their careers, when they were making films.
but their insistence on changes to Perry’s shows resulted in him dropping his plans for a television series and focusing instead on films. The success of *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005) and his subsequent hit films made the transition to television easier. His interactions with the broadcast networks in 2003 resulted in Perry creating a model in which to create his television show and maintain complete ownership and control.

Control has also been part of Banks’s image since her transition from a runway model working in international fashion shows to a supermodel on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* magazine and *Victoria’s Secret* catalogs. Banks made the transition because of her body image. Banks started modeling when she was 12; in her late teens, her body finally went through puberty. She went from a tall, skinny model to a model with curves. At this time, Banks’s mother (who was also her manager) was told by industry insiders that Banks needed to lose weight.\(^{313}\) Instead of giving in to the fashion industry’s demands and becoming a starving model, Banks and her mother decided to leave the world of high fashion behind for commercial clients that would appreciate her womanly curves. Banks could not control the fashion industry’s standards of beauty, but she was able to control her body and career.

For stars, in some ways, technological shifts have given them more control over how their image/personality is distributed.\(^{314}\) Anne Helen Petersen (2007) argues that the use of social networking tools (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) and Internet technologies allows stars to play a key role in the production of their image.\(^{315}\) These technologies serve as a new mode of pub-

\(^{313}\) At the time Banks, who is 5’10, weighed 126 pounds. During puberty, girls experience changes to their hips and breasts, which is what happened to Banks. For more information see Allison Adato, "Tyra Talks," *People* (2007). http://www.people.com (accessed January 22, 2009).

\(^{314}\) Technology has also provided less control at times as well. For example, gossip blogs and websites provide fans with instantaneous and non-stop information about celebrities’ personal lives. One example is Perez Hilton’s use of his blog to out gay celebrities before they have officially told their fans/the public about their sexual orientation.

licity management for stars. It allows them to break news or information about themselves before other media outlets. Obviously, it is difficult to prove if the celebrity or star is actually writing the messages, but these outlets allow stars to incorporate this immediate connection and perception of authenticity as part of their image. The use of online technologies also allows a celebrity to maintain the ordinary/extraordinary distinction that is central to a star image.

Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011) argue that stars’ use of networked media provides “backstage access” for their fans. Twitter is a social networking tool that anyone with Internet access can use. It provides an outlet for stars and personalities to interact more directly with their fans and share information. Stars can tweet about everyday life (e.g., walking their dog or taking their kids to school) and things in their lives that make them extraordinary (e.g., hanging out with other celebrities or working in exotic locations).

Stars, celebrities, and personalities use Twitter in different ways, but most choose to use it in order to have an immediate connection with their fans. Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry use the technology/platform in order to reach their fans and to maintain their images as public creative figure. For Banks and Rhimes, Twitter is used to send out information about their shows and selectively answer questions from fans. Rhimes mostly tweets about Grey’s Anatomy and provides behind-the-scenes pictures. Banks also uses it to connect with fans on a personal level. She calls her followers on Twitter her “Twitter fam” and uses the technology to publicly acknowledge individual members of her “fam.” Although Perry has a Twitter account, he primarily uses it to promote his website and alert fans about recent communication from him,

---

318 Rhimes does tweet about her second series, Private Practice, but most of her tweets focus on GA.
which can then be found on the website. On, tylerperry.com, Perry sends out messages to his fans and allows them to write to him on a message board. The message board has been part of his image construction since 2000. Since his days on the urban theater circuit, Perry has claimed he reads all of the messages posted and uses this feedback for current and future projects. Fans cannot tell if Perry reads the message board because there is not a place on there for him to respond to a specific post. Yet he references the board in his emails to fans and in interviews.  

P. David Marshall (2010) argues that the immediacy of online technologies allows for the perception that fans are “closer to the real than other representations;” he also states that presentational media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) provide a “performance of the actor’s everyday life.” This is especially true for Banks, Rhimes, and Perry. All three use presentational media to share information about themselves as public creative figures and their shows to the fans. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry utilize Twitter and other online technologies to promote and publicize themselves as the key creative figures of their shows. They also reveal personal information about their lives. The Internet and social networking tools give all three immediate access to their fans and allow fans to feel an instant connection to them. I focus on how each public creative figure uses Twitter and their blogs/websites to connect with their fans and also to reinforce their image as the key creative figure. I am focusing only on Twitter and not Facebook for all three case studies because all of these individuals created their Twitter accounts in the same year (2009). Also their Twitter accounts are publicly available and do not require fans have a Twitter 

319 What Perry calls a “message board” is not a message board in the traditional sense. There are not individual threads or discussions. It is pretty much a spot on his webpage where fans can post him a “message.” As of this writing Perry has almost one million messages on his board.
account to view their Tweets. As of this writing, Banks has 7,192,345 followers, Perry has 1,386,944 followers, and Rhimes has 216,813 followers.

Contemporary stars still present images about gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and race. By exemplifying certain traits, stars connect with the audience that identifies with the stars. Audiences look to stars as examples of these qualities. P. David Marshall (2010) claims that celebrities long have played an important role in representing cultural shifts and ideologies: “For much of the twentieth century, celebrities served as beacons of the public world. They helped define the Zeitgeist of any particular moment.” As television personalities, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry play similar roles. Examining how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry view themselves as black public creative figures reveals information about current ideologies and viewpoints in American culture as it relates to race, specifically blackness. Also each uses race in a different way to maintain their image as key creative figures. Shonda Rhimes and Tyra Banks rarely talk about race in their discourse as public creative figures whereas Perry is more open about the challenges for African Americans working in the media industries.

3.1.3 Public Creative Figure and Race

Because the Neo-Cosby Moment is about shifts in blackness onscreen as well as diversity off-screen in the television industry, it is necessary to examine the role race plays in the construction and promotion of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s roles as public creative figures. As discussed in Chapter One, the United States promotes a post-racial ideology in which race does not

---

321 I am focusing only on Twitter because they each created their account in the same year. Also Shonda Rhimes does not have a Facebook account that is accessible to fans. Perry has a Facebook account but primarily uses it to link to messages from his webpage. Banks uses her to post past and current pictures of herself to fans.

322 As indicated in an earlier footnote, I will compare Banks, Rhimes, and Perry to three white executive producers, Heidi Klum, Matthew Weiner, and Steven Levitan. All three of my case studies have more followers than their counterparts. For example, Heidi Klum has 1,031,426 followers on Twitter and Steven Levitan has 63,300. I did not include Matthew Weiner because he does not have a Twitter account.

323 Marshall: 36.
limit one’s advancement in society. In a post-racial society, we have moved so far beyond race that it has become insignificant. In Chapter One, I argue that the term “post-racial” is too limiting for media scholars and that the term “neo-racial” provides scholars with more room for analysis and interpretation. In a neo-racial society, racial differences remain. However, instead of focusing only on these limitations, a neo-racial framework allows us to examine the positive changes as well as the limiting factors that remain in the United States. In a neo-racial society, racial inequities still exist but racism is not the “central and often unyielding impediment to black advancement.”\(^{324}\) It is necessary to examine the context surrounding these inequities. In Chapter Two, I provided the industrial context that resulted in Banks, Rhimes, and Perry being successful while few opportunities existed for other African Americans behind the scenes to advance to their status.

In this chapter, I will explore how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry construct their images as public creative figures and how each addresses the burden of representation. What is interesting is the fact that the themes of public creative figure and race are interconnected. Discussing race is a common theme in their public discourse because of the weight race has in American society. It is also a factor because they are part of a select group of successful African Americans working behind the scenes in television.

In this chapter, I examine Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as separate case studies. To demonstrate the utility of the term “public creative figure,” I first examine how Banks, Rhimes, and Perry promote themselves as the public creative figure for their shows by emphasizing how much control they have behind the scenes. Perry upholds an image of a public creative figure in complete control of all his works. Throughout his career, Perry has been a figure on the periphery of the mainstream. Because of this outsider status, Perry had to figure out how to create and

\(^{324}\) Banks: 41.
promote his works independently, which resulted in Perry having more control over his works. As the public creative figure for a hit drama series on a broadcast network, Shonda Rhimes’s image primarily focuses on her control of narrative and stylistic elements (especially mise-en-scene). Rhimes’s power is in the fact that she knows the fate of her characters. For Tyra Banks, her reputation as a public creative figure is promoting the work she does behind the scenes. As a supermodel-turned-television creator and executive producer, Banks must defend her work by discussing how much work she does when not in front of the camera, such as looking at every photograph submitted and personally selecting the contestants for America’s Next Top Model.

Also within each case study, I explore how each incorporates race, specifically blackness, in their image as public creative figure. Each integrates race into their image in different ways. Shonda Rhimes adheres to a post-racial discourse in which racial differences are presented as inconsequential. Tyler Perry utilizes a neo-racial discourse portraying an industry in which he feels there are inequities but in which he also feels improvements have been made. Tyra Banks integrates both approaches depending on if she is talking about the fashion industry or the television industry.

3.2 Tyler Perry

3.2.1 He who has the gold makes the rules: Tyler Perry Presents “The Tyler Perry Way”

Perry’s image as a public creative figure is largely tied to his unprecedented entrée into television. The discourse surrounding Perry reinforces that he is the public creative figure for House of Payne and all his subsequent works. For Perry, television was the next logical step:

I was onstage and the demand was so huge. I couldn’t reach all the people so then I decided to do film and that demand was even larger so I said ‘How can I get a Tyler Perry type story to a bigger audience’?\textsuperscript{325}

Although he had received media attention from his films, his transition to television received more attention because he did not follow the traditional routine of getting a television show on the air. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is an established process for getting television shows on the air, starting with pitching the idea for the pilot in the fall with the hopes of the broadcast network ordering a pilot to be shot and eventually greenlighting it into a series. Perry’s unprecedented move was self-financing ten episodes of his series, *House of Payne*, and working with syndication company Debmar-Mercury to deliver the shows at no cost to networks to conduct a test run in several key markets. This unprecedented move also allowed him to have complete creative control and is part of his image formation as a public creative figure.

Perry received a lot of media attention from mainstream publications, industry publications, and niche publications because self-financing a television series for syndication was unheard of in the television industry at the time. Perry explains why he went this route: “I get to do it my way, the Tyler Perry way.” The Tyler Perry way resulted in another unheard of decision in the television industry: TBS ordered 100 episodes of the series up front and paid him $200M. Typically it takes a series at least five seasons to reach the 100 episode mark and few reach this point. This agreement with TBS guaranteed that there would be 100 episodes of *HOP* and that it would be available for syndication a year after its premiere in 2007. He also retained complete ownership and creative control, which is very important to Perry and something he un-

---


327 Christian, "Tyler Perry: Sky Is the Limit for 'Madea' Creator with New Movie, Upcoming Book, and TV Show," 35.

328 Frutkin, "Payne Breaks the Mold."; Helem; Tim Stack, "Rocking the 'House'," *Entertainment Weekly*, June 22 2007.
derscored in numerous interviews. “The Tyler Perry way” is a major component of his image as a public creative figure.

The Tyler Perry way starts with all of his works (plays, films, and television series) beginning with the phrase “Tyler Perry’s.” This practice started with his plays. He initiated it as a way to differentiate himself from other plays on the urban theater circuit and later turned it into a brand. Perry says that his name at the beginning of the title informs his fans that it is his work, with his seal of approval. The Tyler Perry way can be seen in all of his projects, from his aforementioned name in the title to his work off-screen. Perry writes, directs, and produces most of his films and plays. For House of Payne, Perry had complete creative control. He directed the first 126 episodes and serves as the executive producer. Although he did not write the episodes, he retained control over the storylines and narrative direction of the series. Perry is one of the few television producers, white or black, with complete ownership and control. This is emphasized throughout the discourse about him across all publications.

Economics is also part of his persona as public creative figure. The Tyler Perry way is to make it yours and keep it yours by being in control financially. Throughout the discourse, Perry states that financial control enables him to have creative control. For years, Perry struggled financially before his first play was a success. He self-financed his play because he wanted to maintain his creative vision. Most articles about Perry talk about how he lived in his car at one point to finance his plays. He figured out a way to create his works on a budget and maintain ownership and creative control. Now Perry describes himself as “I am the money people,”

---

330 Starting with episode 127, Perry brought in other African American directors to direct episodes 127-172. Perry directed episodes 173-76 and now occasionally directs. Perry’s replacement directors are Kim Fields, Chip Hurd, and Roger Bobb.
331 Benson, “Debmar-Mercury Snags ‘Feud’.”
which means that he has a lot more control in his creative projects. In 2008, Tyler Perry opened Tyler Perry Studios in Atlanta, GA. This is the first full-service television and film studio owned and operated by an African American. Perry has constructed an image of himself as a public creative figure in control. He regularly underscores the fact that he does not follow traditional business methods. He reinforces this persona by talking about the importance of creative vision and control over money. For example, in 2003, CBS and Fox expressed interest in working with him but both wanted to make some changes to his series regarding religion. Religion has always been part of Perry’s works, and getting rid of religious references made him uncomfortable: “Once they told me I couldn’t say Jesus on television, I realized it wasn’t going to work for me . . . had I compromised, whatever I did from that point forward always would have seemed like a failure to me.” He remained adamant about his creative vision for the series: “If it doesn't work, it's okay because I was still totally true to myself. That's what's important to me.” Perry’s choice to put television on hold proved to be a smart decision. As of this writing, Perry has completed over two hundred episodes of House of Payne. Its success resulted in a second series, Meet the Browns. TBS again ordered one hundred episodes for MTB after only airing ten episodes. Both shows have been ratings and financial successes for TBS and, in his discourse as a public creative figure, Perry maintains that he is the man in charge of it all. In addition to creative control, Perry’s close supervision of his employees is also part of his image.

As the man in control, Perry demands respect from his employees. In several interviews, he talks about how his employees call him “Mr. Perry.” Perry says that this is especially im-

---

334 Nordyke.
336 Helem, 70.
portant for his younger employees just out of college. When employees are included in stories about Perry, the title, Mr. Perry, is always used. The only individuals who do not reference him as Mr. Perry are the executives from Lions Gate and TBS. One of the show’s writers, Kelly Griffin, summarized Perry’s role on HOP: “We don’t have to answer to a network. We answer to one person: Mr. Perry. He has total creative control of the show.” Even Oprah Winfrey noticed everyone calling him Mr. Perry and sir during a visit on one of his sets and talked about it during an interview with Perry for her magazine. Perry’s need to be called “Mr. Perry” on set could be interpreted as coming from a long-standing reaction of the African American community to racist conditions, especially in the South, where whites would never allow blacks to be addressed as “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” “Sir,” or “Ma’am” in newspaper reports or in person. Inside the African American community, dignity and formality of address was an important effort that was stressed to combat those white slurs.

In his image as public creative figure, Perry talks about how proud he is of his status as the man in charge and how he is able to maintain control because he is economically efficient. For House of Payne, Perry shoots three episodes a week. A traditional broadcast network sitcom shoots one episode a week. He describes how he has been able to do this:

I can do it efficiently and at a fraction of what it costs in Hollywood because there are not 20 executives telling you ‘Move the cup to the left’ or ‘I don’t like the color of her sweater.’ These are the kinds of notes they do on television shows. I go down, I look at everything. I like it. We shoot the show. I don’t’ have all those people trying to justify their jobs.

---

338 Benzie.
340 For more information see Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
341 Christian, "Becoming Tyler."
By not compromising his creative vision, Perry devised a system that allows him to have complete creative control and ownership of his works. In addition, the Tyler Perry way as a public creative figure is to acknowledge the amount of control and power he has behind the scenes because he worked hard to get to this position. The creation of Tyler Perry Studios provided Perry with the ability to work on different projects simultaneously. Perry talks about working on *HOP* in the morning and walking to another soundstage in the afternoon to shoot a film. Throughout this discourse, there is no doubt that Perry is in control during production. The fact that Perry also appears onscreen in his works does not place any limitations on his image as the man in charge.

In the discourse, the Tyler Perry way is to continuously remind interviewers (and readers) that he is the one in charge of all of his projects. From 2005-2010, Perry acted in one film that was not his own; he had a cameo in *Star Trek* (2009). Perry claimed he took the acting job because the film’s director, J.J. Abrams, asked him to do it. He also wanted to see if he could be on someone else’s set. Perry’s role was a two-day shoot, and he found it challenging not to be the one in charge: “(once) I yelled ‘Cut!’ on the set, and the whole room turned and looked at (Abrams). It was my fault. I was screwing up the line and I yelled ‘Cut!’ They all look at J.J. and J.J. has this big smile on his face.” This anecdote demonstrates how much control is part of Perry’s image. Even Abrams knows that Perry cannot help himself; Perry is so used to being in control that it is difficult to step away from that role. Yet one thing Perry cannot control is the

---

342 Block; Christian, "Becoming Tyler."; Drumming, "The Gospel According to Tyler Perry."
343 Perry’s story certainly embodies the “American Dream” ideology. At his lowest point during his early theater career, Perry lived in his car. He also talks about growing up working/lower-class in New Orleans. While this is part of his image, it is not part of Rhimes’s image, who grew up middle-class/lower upper-class, which is why it is not a theme in this chapter.
color of his skin and how race is always a component of his image as a public creative figure. Also, the limited number of successful African Americans in positions of power behind the scenes intensifies Perry’s discourse as a black public creative figure.

3.2.2 Tyler Perry- Black Power

Perry’s audience makes race a central component to his image as a black public creative figure. His works are designed for an underserved audience: faith-based urban viewers. Audience demographics, specifically black viewers, are tied more to Perry’s image as a black public creative figure than Banks or Rhimes. This also means that Perry receives more criticism about his works than the other two, especially regarding the quality of images he produces. Some critics believe his works are detrimental to African Americans and set the African American race back hundreds of years.346 Perry has been struggling with this line of criticism since starting on the urban theater circuit. He defends himself by saying that the characters he creates are based off people he has known. Perry states that the critics “(don’t) bother me. There’s a clear division . . . Either you get it and understand the purpose of it or you don’t. The intent of the whole thing is to make someone feel better.”347 He also does not let the critics change his vision. He tells interviewers (and notes in messages on his website) that he is only accountable to his fans; they let him know via his online message board how he is doing. For Perry, his goal as a public creative figure is to create works that speak to his very specific group of dedicated fans.348 He acknow-

347 Hirshey, "Tyler Perry's Brand New Day."
348 The themes that Perry uses in his works will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.
edges that his works are for his fans and they respond well to his works, which can be seen by looking at audience ratings, box office receipts, or merchandise sales.

Perry says that he used his power as a black public creative figure to increase diversity onscreen and off-screen. He openly discussed the lack of opportunity for African Americans in the industry: “black people can’t get work now in Hollywood. You can’t get a movie, can’t get a television show.” His inspiration for House of Payne came from “people that I know and situations that I know.” Perry claimed: “For the most part, people speak from their own experiences and in Hollywood, there have not been a lot of African Americans who have been able to tell their stories, unfiltered, unedited, with no notes and bring (them) directly to the people.”

As a key creative figure, Perry’s control behind the scenes allowed him to create HOP his way. HOP is a black-oriented sitcom, but Perry calls it a dramedy. He said he had to do this because “it’s so difficult for African American people to have a drama on television. It’s rarely happened before, so where else do you put it? Until I get into a position where I can have a complete drama, then I’ll keep mixing [the genres] together.” Perry also hired two actors from his plays, LaVan Davis and Cassi Davis (no relation), to play Curtis and Ella Payne. His discussion of both actors reinforces his image a black public creative figure: “I really am especially happy for Cassi and LaVan who had been knocking on doors for years trying to get a job in Hollywood. As talented as they are nobody would hire them. Now look at them!” The success of HOP resulted in Perry creating a spin-off, Meet the Browns, which also features a mostly African American cast.


Stack, "Rocking the 'House'."
In 2008, Perry opened Tyler Perry Studios (TPS) in Atlanta. The studio is the first movie and television studio owned by an African American.\textsuperscript{354} Perry created TPS to accommodate his increasing number of film and television productions. According to \textit{Entertainment Weekly}, Perry’s studio is the top employer of black actors in Hollywood.\textsuperscript{355} He has 300 employees working at TPS. Perry says he uses television to continue the work he has done in film in increasing diversity onscreen. He makes movies because:

I look at movies where there are no African Americans at all and I go ‘Where in the world is this place where there are no black people?’ I want . . . people who have been ignored by Hollywood for years to get great entertainment that they can share with their families.\textsuperscript{356}

For Perry, his job as a public creative figure always goes back to his fans, who he feels are more important than any industry executive or media critic. He unabashedly creates projects that appeal to his loyal urban faith-based audience.

3.2.3 A Message from Tyler Perry

As noted above, on his website, Perry posts messages to fans, which they can also receive directly via email. He posts at least two messages a month.\textsuperscript{357} As noted above, on his website, Perry posts messages to fans, which they can also receive directly via email. He posts at least two messages a month.\textsuperscript{358} As discussed earlier in the chapter, it impossible to know if Perry actually wrote these messages. However, these messages are constructed as if he is sending his

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{354} Cori Murray, "Oh, What a Night!," \textit{Essence}, December 2008; Parekh. Perry was acknowledged as the first movie and television studio owned by an African American. Oprah Winfrey has a television studio but not a film studio. Harpo Studios is only for TV productions. Harpo Films is only a production company. Tim Reid used investors to build his New Millennium Studios in Virginia in 1997.

\textsuperscript{355} Svetkey, Watson, and Wheat.


\textsuperscript{357} The exception to this occurred in spring 2008. Perry did not post a message to fans for three months. In April 2008, he revealed to fans that he was unable to send messages to fans because he had been dealing with a stalker.

\textsuperscript{358} The exception to this occurred in spring 2008. Perry did not post a message to fans for three months. In April 2008, he revealed to fans that he was unable to send messages to fans because he had been dealing with a stalker.
\end{flushleft}
fans a direct and personal message, which reinforces his persona as a public creative figure in control. In interviews and in messages sent to fans, Perry claims that he reads all of the messages that fans post on his website and their feedback is more important than any critic or executive. In most of his messages, he thanks fans for their loyalty and mentions that he reads their messages. In his messages about *HOP*, he tells fans to tune in because of the storylines. For example, on 5 August 2008, he warned fans about the intensity of the upcoming 100th episode: “You’ll be blowing up the message boards. I know it. I’ll be online tomorrow as I’m watching to see what you have to say about it.”

Perry makes sure his fans know that he is appreciative of their loyalty and he continues to deliver projects for them. For example, Perry wrote to fans before the release of *Madea Goes to Jail* (2009):

Everyone who has seen this says it’s the best “Madea” movie I’ve done. I’ll let you be the judge of that. I’m sure you will be on the message board letting me know what you thought . . . Because you all have showed up in record numbers on the first weekend [of previous Perry releases], I have been able to keep making movies our way— the way we want to see them.

Perry makes his fans feel as if they are part of the Tyler Perry team by using the words “we” and “our.” When Perry’s *The Family That Preys* came out in September 2008, he told his fans:

So, I’ll see you at the movies this weekend. All my seniors, I know you all go out for the matinees. So, I’ll look to hear from your first on the message board. All my other folks, just drop me a line after you see it. I can’t wait to hear what you think. Also check your ticket stubs, you know how that goes. Make sure it’s for our film so we can get credit. Remember, you’re my critics not anybody else.

---

359 Hirshey, "Tyler Perry's Brand New Day."; Mabrey and Harris; Stack, "Rocking the 'House'."; Svetkey, Watson, and Wheat.
360 The number of messages Perry sends to his fans also increases for major occasions such as before and during the release of a film, opening of a play, etc. Tyler Perry, "A Message from Tyler Perry August 5, 2008," (2008).
The emphasis Perry places on reading his messages reinforces his image. He knows his fans have made him a success, which provided him with the resources to be a key creative figure with control. Perry emphasizes that he is the one reading his messages because his fans are too important to assign the task to an assistant or employee, which reinforces his persona as public creative figure. He talks about the loyalty of his audience, and he repays that loyalty by treating them as important people in his life in interviews and in messages on his website. He closes messages with phrases such as “Yo Boy,” “Love ya,” “Thanks again,” “Talk to you soon,” and “You know how to get me.” He signs most emails with “TP” or “Tyler.”

Perry continues this intimacy and informality throughout all of the personal messages that he sends directly to his fans. He claims he sends such notes in order to show how he is like them. Perry has overcome personal, emotional, physical, and financial challenges in his life. He uses these stories throughout his discourse to show that it is possible to overcome obstacles. For Perry, he has been able to thrive and succeed because of his faith in God. He uses his plays, films, television shows, and messages to fans to demonstrate his faith. For Perry, he has been a successful public creative figure because of his faith and his fans who also share similar religious beliefs.

Perry started a Twitter account in August 2009, but most of the posts on Twitter refer to messages on his website or for posting information about upcoming radio and television interviews. However, he has slowly started to use Twitter to make more connections with his fans. For example, in September 2009, Perry was in New York promoting his film *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*. He asked his Twitter followers where to eat:

Where can I get a good Italian meal in NYC?

---

Ok everybody seems to be suggesting Carmine’s. Thanks for the recommendations.
The food was amazing at Carmine’s! Too much for one person to eat. If I’m bloated tomorrow, it’s your fault. LOL. Thx.364

Twitter provides fans with immediate access to Perry. This points to the limitations of his message board. Although fans know he constantly reads messages posted on the board, they do not know when or what time he will post. Also, although they can post messages, they cannot post replies to specific messages posted. As of September 2012, 1,747,761 people have posted messages to Perry.365 Yet Perry continuously emphasizes in his discourse as public creative figure that he reads all of the messages posted on his website. He uses Twitter as an outlet to reinforce this as part of his persona: “I’ve been reading all of my messages. I’m glad you all love the movie! I do too.”366 Twitter provides Perry with the capability to send short quick messages to fans to let them know personal details about his life (going to the gym or feeling ill) as well as information about his plays, television shows, and movies.

Tyler Perry embodies a neo-racial discourse in his image as public creative figure by openly discussing the challenges for African Americans working in the media industries. For Perry, his journey from theater to film and television demonstrates that we are not in a post-racial society in which race has become insignificant. Race was a major factor in his transition to film and television. He had television and film executives tell him that black Christian women (his


365 For more information see http://www.tylerperry.com/talk. As of this writing, I have been unsuccessful in finding out how many people subscribe to Perry’s emailing list. The site administrator has not responded to my emails. However, in March 2005, Perry had 400,000 email subscribers. Gregory Kirschling, "Mad Props," Entertainment Weekly, March 11 2005.

plays’ primary demographic) do not go to the movies or watch a lot of television.\textsuperscript{367} Perry has been successful because his works connect with this underserved demographic. Yet his continued success also means that Perry has broadened his audience.\textsuperscript{368} In addition to increasing African American representation onscreen, Perry has been successful in adding diversity off-screen. Tyler Perry Studios has over 300 employees and according to Perry, “A lot of them are African American and people who haven't been able to get jobs in Hollywood. They've been able to come here and make a great living, so it's really fantastic.”\textsuperscript{369} The discourse surrounding Perry as a public creative figure emphasizes a man in creative control of all of his works. Perry makes sure that in the interviews he provides or messages he sends to his fans reinforce he is the one in charge. The same cannot be said for Tyra Banks, who must separate her image as a model from her new identity as a public creative figure. Unlike Perry, Banks’s image centers around proving that she is the woman in charge behind the scenes on America’s Next Top Model.

3.3 Tyra Banks

3.3.1 From Supermodel to Super Mogul

Before ANTM aired on UPN in 2003, Banks was known primarily as a supermodel. Her star image was a hardworking but gorgeous model seen in magazines and on the runway. She maintained this image with her transition to television: “With 'Supermodel [original title of ANTM],' I want to demystify the glamour and show the challenges and hard work of becoming a

\textsuperscript{367} See Hirshey, “Tyler Perry's Brand New Day.”; Lee, Nordyke; Stack, "Rocking the 'House'."

\textsuperscript{368} Perry has appealed to white audiences through casting. The Family That Preys (2008) was Perry’s first film with a white lead, actress Kathy Bates. Perry also hired Kim Kardashian as a supporting cast member in The Marriage Counselor (2013).

supermodel but in a humorously hip and edgy way.” Yet she also transformed her image from supermodel to super mogul by creating, executive producing, and hosting *ANTM*.

Banks also justifies her position as a public creative figure by saying that she wanted work in television since she was a child. She was enrolled at Loyola Marymount University to study film and television production when she decided to pursue her modeling career overseas. Her interest in production was put on the backburner until *ANTM*. As creator and executive producer, she wanted to play a major role behind the scenes.

Banks’s fame allowed her and production partner, Ken Mok, a meeting with CBS in 2002 to discuss her idea for *ANTM*. CBS executive Chen Maynard declined the project for CBS but suggested the show would be a good fit for UPN. Dawn Ostroff, head of UPN programming at the time, admitted that she had the meeting with Banks as a courtesy. As of 2003, reality shows such as *The Bachelor* (ABC), *Survivor* (CBS), *Amazing Race* (CBS), *Big Brother* (CBS), *American Idol* (Fox), and *The Apprentice* (NBC) were performing well in the ratings. However, *ANTM* was the first reality competition on the broadcast networks to explore the world of modeling. Before *ANTM*, the only show with models was the annual *Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show* (CBS, 2001-). Subsequently this courtesy meeting resulted in one of the most successful programs for UPN and it became the flagship show for newly formed The CW in 2006.

---

371 Dawn and others, "Reality Bytes."
372 "'Model' Making."
When the show first premiered, Banks worked hard to promote herself as its public creative figure. Because the show is a modeling competition, it is not difficult to believe Banks created the series and would host it. The bigger challenge is believing that Banks’s executive producer title is not a vanity label. Throughout the discourse, Banks references how she labored to prove that she made significant executive and creative contributions to *ANTM*. It was tough transition for Banks:

On the set of Top Model, every day was at first a fight because some people thought I was just a model posing as an executive producer. People who had positions lower than mine didn’t accept me as their boss. After a while, a couple of them apologized for doubting me so much. I had the power to fire those people, but I just wanted to prove them wrong.\(^\text{376}\)

Like Perry, Banks promotes herself as an actively involved, hands-on public creative figure.\(^\text{377}\) She says that she has been hands-on since the beginning: “I was in that edit bay every single day during the first season.”\(^\text{378}\) In addition, Banks used her own wardrobe for herself and the model-contestants for cycle one.\(^\text{379}\) She also helped with the set design and even pitched in by picking up a glue gun.\(^\text{380}\) Banks provided all of these examples to demonstrate that she is a true key creative figure on *ANTM*. After the show became a success, Banks still talks about her work as a central figure in *ANTM*’s production and post-production. Although she does not have to use a glue gun anymore, Banks maintains in interviews that she continues to work hard throughout production. She discusses her work: “I'm dealing with the budget and coming up with the creative side of what the girls are doing on the show. I'm editing the show, promoting


\(^{379}\) "Model' Making."

\(^{380}\) Ibid.
it, and figuring out marketing plans.”\textsuperscript{381} These examples help shift focus from Banks as a supermodel that had everything done for her to a hard-working television professional. While creating a new image for herself as a public creative figure, Banks also worked on creating a star/model image for the model-contestants on her show.

As public creative figure, Banks takes her role very seriously. She continuously talks about how she designed \textit{ANTM} to be entertaining as well as informative.\textsuperscript{382} On the show, the photo shoot challenges are framed as being inspired by photographs and experiences from Banks’s modeling career. These shoots are designed to show how hard it is to be a model from hair and makeup to the actual shoot. Banks says she did this out of obligation to her fans:

While I love the fashion industry and I owe my success to modeling, I’m also conflicted about it. . . That’s why it’s so important to show young women the retouching, styling, and makeup tricks they use to make models look perfect. In fact, it’s irresponsible not to show that stuff.\textsuperscript{383}

\textit{ANTM}’s success resulted in a second television show for Banks. In 2005, she launched \textit{The Tyra Banks Show}, a daytime talk show. Again the discourse about the new program focused on Banks’s work behind-the-scenes. Lisa Hackner, senior vice president of development for Telepictures Productions (the company that produced \textit{TTBS}), described Banks’s role: "She comes to meetings with a notebook full of ideas and with things typed out, ready to present. She doesn't just have an opinion; she comes fully prepared.”\textsuperscript{384}

Banks talks about her role as public creative figure in interviews but her presence on Twitter allows her to directly tell her fans the hard work she puts in on \textit{ANTM}. On Twitter, Banks tells fans that editing is one of her favorite aspects of her job and then told them what ex-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Aldore D. Collier, "Tyra Banks: Success as Fashion Model and Businesswoman Makes Her a Role Model," \textit{Jet}, October 30 2006, 62. Also see Collier, "Tyra: The Joys & Perils of Being a Top Model."
\item Andreeva, "Banks Joins UPN in Talent Search for 'Supermodel'."; Christian, "Tyra Banks Says 'It's More Than Just Looks' to Become 'America's Next Top Model'."
\item Albiniaik, "Two for the Show."
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
actly goes on during the production process. For example, on 2 March 2010, she tweeted that she had been working on a new edit of the opening credits. She also told fans details about the next cycle such as the location for the finale. In addition, Banks frequently discussed how she oversees the entire process of selecting the finalists. She claimed that she looks at every single entry. This has always been part of Banks’s discourse but with Twitter she is able to discuss it in more detail and more personally. On 19 August 2010, she tweeted “Going through your pics for #ANTM Cycle 16- so many good ones . . . so hard to choose.” In these tweets she can tell fans how involved she is and provide them with a sense of backstage access to the world of ANTМ. These tweets also help Banks maintain her image as the public creative figure for ANTМ.

3.3.2 Tyra Banks- Racial Responsibility

As public creative figures, Banks and Perry are very similar in how they incorporate control into their image. Both use interviews or Twitter to talk about their roles as executive producers. Yet, there is one aspect of her image that Banks cannot control: Like Perry, one area that is always part of Banks’s discourse is race. Depending on the topic, Banks shifts between a post-racial and neo-racial ideology. She incorporates a neo-racial perspective when she talks about her modeling career. Hard work and challenges have always been a part of Tyra Banks’s image. As a model, she became the first black woman to be on the cover of GQ, Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue and the Victoria’s Secret catalog. She acknowledged how hard she worked as a model to break these barriers. For Banks, the burden of representation as a black executive producer in television rests on presenting a diverse group of model-contestants. It was a top priority

385 On the show, the top six models are flown to an international location. The only time the series did not travel outside of the United States was cycle 13. The final destination was Honolulu, Hawaii.

386 Christian, “Tyra Banks: Creator of TV’s ’America’s Next Top Model’ Tells Why Singing Is Her Next Move ”.

from the beginning. The racial inequities in the modeling industry are also another reason Banks claims she created *ANTM*:

Being a Black woman, it was important for me to have Black women on the show and also Latinos. That's hard to find in reality. I tried to be as racially diverse as possible and not just have a token on the show. I also wanted to have different skin tones and shades so that Black women can look at ourselves on the show and connect in some type of way and possibility see a mirror of ourselves on the show.

As *ANTM*’s public creative figure, Banks also uses the show as a platform for a bigger issue within the African American community: fixation on skin tone. There is discrimination within the African American community regarding the color of one’s skin. Banks discusses it throughout her discourse as key creative figure: “Why are white people in the fashion industry . . . saying this [dark skin] is beautiful but my own community is not saying this is beautiful . . . I used the power that I have, which is casting girls on *Top Model*.”

In the construction of her image, Banks talks about how she wanted *ANTM* to be a competition but also an outlet for young African American viewers. Banks has constructed an image as a role model for people of color. Young women watching the show will have a resource for identification. Banks claims that she uses her role as a black public creative figure to serve as an inspiration: “there are so many young, black girls out there looking at me on television and saying ‘Look at her. She’s doing it. She comes from a background just like mine. She’s doing it so I shouldn’t give up.’”

There was one notable instance in which Banks discussed the tension in creating compelling television and being an executive producer. During cycle four (2005), Tiffany, an African

---

388 Christian, "Tyra Banks: Creator of TV's 'America's Next Top Model' Tells Why Singing Is Her Next Move ."
391 Collier, "Tyra Banks: Success as Fashion Model and Businesswoman Makes Her a Role Model," 63.
American contestant, was not dejected when she was eliminated from the show. Instead, during her goodbyes with the other model-contestants, she laughed and joked about her elimination. Also before she was eliminated, Tiffany attempted to use the color of her skin as reason why she would not succeed as a model. The combination of these factors resulted in Banks yelling at Tiffany. As host, Banks typically maintains the image of a cool, collected supermodel, but this was one of the few occasions that Banks lost her composure. After the episode aired, the scene was a popular topic for journalists to raise with Banks. As executive producer, Banks could have eliminated the scene or minimized her outburst at Tiffany. However, she and the other producers decided to keep it as part of the show and explains what happened that day:

I do think I took it too far how I went off on her. It hurts me for a young girl to tell me that because of the color of her skin and her background that’s she’s not going to be successful. There were a lot of conversations that went on off-camera. Because you’re a black girl and you’re looking at white girls and think they’re going to succeed because they’re white, that just bubbled up inside me and I got upset. But at the same time, I’m executive producer.  

Although Banks discusses racial imbalance in the modeling industry, she does not talk about this imbalance in the television industry: “As a model, my roadblock was being black and curvy. As a producer, my roadblock was being a model.” For Banks, the challenges she experienced in the transition to television are about her former career and not her race, which reinforces a post-racial ideology. Also when she talks about race and ANTM, the conversation is about inequities in the fashion industry and not the television industry. For example, Banks lauded her own work in adding diversity to the modeling industry (but not to television):

A lot of times the fashion world doesn't give a lot of attention to American Black girls from urban areas. I don't mean to pat my own back, but ANTM pulled down the curtain to this world that people thought they couldn't be a part of. Now every

392 Ibid., 62-63.
girl is like 'I want to be a model.' I feel like the world is more accessible, but by no means less prestigious. 394

As a black public creative figure, Banks acknowledges using her power to create a diverse competition on ANTM. However, she does not perceive these inequities in television. Banks is one of the few successful African American public creative figures in reality television. If Banks experienced any challenges as a woman of color in television production, she does not mention it at all in her interviews. However in interviews and on ANTM, she freely discusses the challenges she faced as a model of color in the modeling industry. In most of this discourse, Banks focuses more on the challenges she experienced as a model transitioning to television. In addition to interviews, Banks uses online technologies to promote her image as a public creative figure and to instantly connect with her fans.

3.3.3 Tyra’s Twitter Fam

Like Perry, Banks also started a Twitter account in 2009. However, she uses Twitter more than Perry as a way to directly connect with her fans and talk about her role behind the scenes. For example, from July 2009 - December 2010, Perry tweeted 94 times whereas Banks sent out 1,048 tweets. 395 During this period, she averaged 58 tweets a month. 396 On Twitter, Banks reveals information about her personal life, which demonstrates that she is like everyone else: “my feet b hurtin’ after walking in heels all day . . . Girls I know u feel my pain!” 397 When she created her account, she claims that did not use one of her iconic modeling photos. Instead she used a nonprofessional photo because she wanted to “put up a real pic and not some glam,

395 Banks sent out her first tweet on July 18, 2009 and Perry sent his on August 15, 2009.
396 During this period, Perry averaged 5 tweets a month. However, most of his tweets are links to messages posted on his webpage.
retouched crap that anyone can get.”398 Banks also stated on Twitter that “it feels so good to be able to be myself and chill with you all on twitter. Twittering is like a highlight of my day!!!”399 Banks also discloses personal information such as beauty imperfections, bad breath, her love of junk food, and intimate details of her life. She also provides beauty tips and advice: “@sanaili girl! Don’t sleep in ur makeup of u’ll wake up w/juicy zits like the one I have on my cheek right now. but mine is from aunt flow.”400 Banks’s Twitter use demonstrates the ordinary-extraordinary feature of stars. She is like other women in that shoes hurt her feet too but she also talks about her extraordinary life as former supermodel/public creative figure for ANTM in which she wears designer clothes and travels the world.

Like Perry, Twitter is a resource for Banks to maintain her persona while also making a personal connection to fans. Banks also uses a personal signature, but Banks primarily uses hers when she responds to Tweets or re-Tweets: “RT@laura_model @tyrabanks Who creates concepts 4 #ANTM phtoshts? luv the disappearing perfume- ME N FAB PRODUCING TEAM. THAT 1 WAS ME TyTy.”401 Banks also differs from Perry in that she interacted more with her followers re-tweeting their posts and answering their questions whereas most of his tweets were links to messages on his website. The re-tweets, personal signature, and personal tweets provide

---

a connection between Banks and her followers. She uses the word “fams” to describe her followers on Twitter because it “feels more inclusive less celeb.”

Banks is also an example of a personality using social networking as celebrity management. There have been two key instances in which Banks used Twitter to talk about rumors surrounding *ANTM*. The first occurred on 30 November 2009. She tweeted to fans that the rumors regarding the international destination for cycle 14 were true and her “fams” were the first to know. This is an example of Banks using online technologies to maintain control. Yet the statement contradicts itself. Banks’s fans/followers on Twitter already know because of the rumors. The rumors were out before Banks made the declaration that her Twitter family is the first to know. Yet by posting this on Twitter, Banks maintains her image as public creative figure in control. She also used Twitter to break the news about cycle 15’s location: “You are the first to know . . . I’m on my way to ITALY for America’s Next Top Model Cycle 15!”

The second example of using Twitter as damage control surrounding rumors about *ANTM* occurred over a promotional video for cycle 15 that showed Banks and the other judges making a big deal over one of the contestant’s very tiny waist. Banks received a lot of media attention about this promotional video because it appeared as if she was promoting the idea that all models (and women) should have waists this small. Banks tweeted on 13 August 2010 “I love that u r concerned with/#ANTM’s mixed body image messages. Sometimes editing can b misconstrued. U deserve the truth. Will send today.” Banks ended up apologizing for the promo:

Like all of my projects, I am extremely involved in America’s Next Top Model from casting the final contestants to conceptualizing the episode challenges, but with all the work and details that go into producing a TV show, I can’t be 100%

404 Tyra Banks, “You Are the First to Know,” (2010).
places at once (although I try), but it’s just impossible for me to see everything that’s created before it’s released to all of you! That being said I can assure you – that cut has been removed from the CW airwaves, and the message conveyed in that video was NOT intentional, and is certainly not Top Model- or Tyra-approved.

Banks attempted to take control of the situation by directly sending this message to her fans (and critics) through Twitter and her website. The message is interesting because she claimed that she is in control behind the scenes but cannot control everything. This example also demonstrates a crack in Banks’s image as a public creative figure. She can work in the edit bay everyday or select all the photo shoot themes, but she cannot control what the broadcast network does with her program. In this tweet, Banks admits the occasional loss of control but she also reminds fans that she remains a key figure off-screen. She starts the apology by mentioning how much work she does to provide entertainment on ANTM and ends with the phrase “Tyra-approved,” which reinforces her role as public creative figure for ANTM.

What is also interesting is that Banks’s followers know through her tweets who is responsible for the video: The CW’s promotional department. In this situation, Banks does not blame the promo department. However, on 7 November 2009, Banks received many tweets from fans upset that she tweeted about a double elimination on the next episode, which would only leave two models for the finale. This was a major shift in the ANTM playbook. Generally the last episode in the cycle begins with the final three model-contestants competing for two slots in a runway show. Fans wanted to know why Banks released such crucial information. Banks stated on Twitter that the promo department had already informed fans about the upcoming double elimi-

---

407 Banks sent a link to her statement on Twitter. The message is too long for Twitter and had to be posted on her website.
nation, which meant that her Twitter postings about it were not spoilers. Banks then shifted the Twitter conversation to a question for fans about what they would like to see on future cycles of *ANTM*.

Twitter allows Banks to connect with fans but also maintain her image as a woman in control of the conversation. She can talk about the hard work she performs on *ANTM* and also control the topic of conversation. For example, in July 2009 Banks tweeted a picture of the model-contestants from the upcoming cycle. However, the picture consisted only of the models’ feet. Banks tweets: “Even tho i’m creator & exec producer, I still have peeps i have to answer to!” *ANTM* airs on a broadcast network and Banks must create a product that will attract viewers to the network. Working for a network does not lessen Banks’s image creation as a public creative figure; being accountable to the networks is part of the job. Working within the broadcast network structure is something Banks has in common with Shonda Rhimes.

In the discourse, Banks flips between post-racial and neo-racial viewpoints. She is very open about the challenges of being a model of color in the modeling industry, which reinforces a neo-racial ideology. Even though she was a supermodel, Banks had limited control in the modeling industry. When she made the transition to television, she made sure she had control as creator and executive producer of *ANTM*. Yet Banks is so focused on proving that she works hard as an executive producer that she overlooks the importance of her position behind the scenes as one of the few African American female executive producers working in television, which is absent in the discourse. When it comes to the television industry, she maintains a post-racial ideology, which is something she has in common with Shonda Rhimes.

---

3.4 Shonda Rhimes

3.4.1 Shonda Who?

In 2008, *Black Enterprise* published a list of the Top 25 Hollywood Moneymakers; Rhimes was number two on the list. The publication says that “Shonda Rhimes doesn't have name or face recognition but she is a powerhouse.”[410] Shonda Rhimes was the first African American woman to create and executive produce two dramas on television. Rhimes is similar to Banks and Perry because her first career was not in television. Rhimes received her BA in English Literature from Dartmouth and her MFA from USC.[411] After graduate school, Rhimes worked in television and film. She co-wrote the teleplay for HBO’s *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* (1999). She wrote the screenplay for *Princess Diaries 2* (2004) and *Crossroads* (2002). Rhimes credits being sick as a child, working as a candy striper, and watching medical surgeries on TV as her inspirations for creating *Grey’s Anatomy*.[412] *GA* was Rhimes’s first television show to make it to broadcast.[413] Her first show, about female war correspondents did not make it past the pilot stage due to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, Touchstone Television and ABC had faith in Rhimes and asked her to write another pilot, which turned out to be *Grey’s Anatomy*. Also at the time of her first deal with Touchstone Television, Stephen McPherson was the company president and liked her work. In 2004, McPherson became president of prime-time entertainment for ABC. McPherson was instrumental in getting *GA* on the air as a midseason replacement. The success of *Grey’s Anatomy* resulted in a new deal between Rhimes and Touchstone Television. In 2006, the studio signed Rhimes to a three-year contract worth ten

---

million dollars, which was a rare deal for an African American showrunner in Hollywood. With GA, Rhimes transitioned from being a writer to an executive producer and public creative figure.

Rhimes’s experience as a writer for films and television provided her with the power she would need to be the public creative figure for GA. In television, writers have greater power and influence than in film. As Vic Bulluck, executive director of the NAACP Hollywood Bureau, notes: "In television, the power lies with the writer. Most television producers start out as writers and move up the programming ladder to the position of executive producer-show runner. It's a Herculean achievement to become a show runner." Like Perry and Banks, Rhimes skipped some of the usual steps, which is its own feat. Banks and Perry were able to do so because of their previous successes and already established image in the public eye. Rhimes’s prior writing experience assisted her in being the one in control. She described the transition from independent screenwriter to creator and executive producer:

If you watch a movie that I’ve written . . . chances are it’s not what was in my head. It’s what’s in the director’s head. That’s not a bad thing, but with this show, every episode is what was in my head. So I feel very gratified creatively.

Rhimes’s image as the public creative figure began to solidify when GA became an instant ratings success in its first season. During the first two years of GA, most of the media attention surrounding Rhimes focused on her race (discussed in further detail in the next section) and her narrative control behind the scenes. The emphasis on the narrative is because of the ratings success of GA. Everyone wanted to know what was going to happen to the medical residents at Seattle Grace Hospital. TV Guide described Rhimes as “the keeper of the secrets.”

---

414 Andreeva, "Rhimes on Touchstone Staff to '09."; Brown, "Shonda Rhimes."
415 Gillespie, 58.
Rhimes did not want viewers to know what happened next because she wanted them to tune in and be surprised. As the show’s creator, executive producer, and public creative figure, she bragged that she knows what the final scenes of the each season finale will be but she refused to disclose the details.\(^\text{418}\) Rhimes even kept information from her actors until the last minute to prevent leaks to the press.\(^\text{419}\) She stated that as the public creative figure for the show, “I'm the person demanding that my actors don't reveal anything.”\(^\text{420}\) She also has fake storylines and ideas posted on the walls in the writers’ room to keep information from being distributed to the public.\(^\text{421}\)

Rhimes’s persona as a public creative figure focuses on how she has the ultimate say on every aspect of the show. She writes scripts and approves scripts written by the writing staff. Rhimes is also responsible for making the final selections on music and wardrobe.\(^\text{422}\) After the show is shot, she works with the editors on shot selection and at keeping the show at forty two minutes. Once it was announced that Rhimes had a second prime-time series set to air, *Private Practice*, some critics worried that she would be spread too thin and *Grey’s Anatomy* would suffer because of it. Even the head of the network at the time, Stephen McPherson later admitted to the *Hollywood Reporter* that Rhimes did too much on both programs.\(^\text{423}\) However, when Tyler Perry brought a second series to TBS, no one worried about him being spread too thin because Perry’s intense work schedule is part of his image as a public creative figure in control.\(^\text{424}\)

---

\(^\text{420}\) Fonseca.
\(^\text{421}\) Albinia, "Why 'Grey' Seems So Bright."
\(^\text{423}\) Dawn, "Vital Signs."; O'Connor; ibid; Rice.
\(^\text{424}\) The differences between Rhimes and Perry coverage with running two shows could be the result of several contextual factors such as gender, industry, or genre. For example, it is possible that the critics did not worry
Rhimes’s show has a larger audience than Perry’s and is on a broadcast network. Although *House of Payne* is an important show to TBS, it is not as important as *Grey’s Anatomy* was to ABC. Rhimes received a reprieve because of the writers’ strike that shortened *Private Practice*’s first season and *Grey’s Anatomy*’s fourth season. According to Rhimes, the strike gave her time to figure out how to balance two shows. Rhimes continues to write and executive produce both series and believes that the shows do not suffer from her time being divided between them. She told *TV Guide*, for example, that “Two shows is a huge challenge and it’s not like I have somebody else running my shows for me.” She reports on Twitter how actively involved she is on both shows and how she divides her time and energy to both.

The biggest component of Rhimes’s image as public creative figure is being in control of the show’s narrative. Throughout the discourse, she talks about how she knows the outcome for all of the characters in her ensemble cast drama. As creator, she has an additional vested interest in the series. She provides notes to the writers about certain aspects of the characters. For example, *GA* writer Krista Vernoff says that she once received a note from Rhimes about a scene in which Meredith, the main character on the show, is sitting at the bar drinking a beer. Rhimes told Vernoff that “Meredith is me. Meredith drinks cocktails.” Rhimes also claims working in the editing room allows her to be alone with the characters and come up with ideas and storylines about the quality of Perry’s shows because they dismissed the show after a few episodes in its first season, which is something I explore more in the next chapter. Gender is also another aspect of these case studies that I did not examine in much detail but will address in Chapter Five in limitations of study and areas for future research. As I discussed in the previous chapter, basic cable does not have the prime-time scheduling pressures that the broadcast networks have, which could explain why the press focused more on Rhimes spreading herself too thin. At the time *GA* was one of the network’s most popular shows and Rhimes’s inability to multitask could hurt the show’s ratings (and ABC).

---

425 Rice.

426 Although Rhimes had assistance with the day-to-day operations, Krista Vernoff (*GA*) and Marti Noxon (*PP*), Rhimes talked about how much work she did for both shows: “I am sitting here typing on scripts for *Grey’s* and then I pull up a script for *Private* and I work on that and then I have to cut *Grey’s* and I have to cut *Private* -- it's not easy. The first season, which was the year of the strike, almost killed me. If we hadn't gone on strike, I don't know that I would've survived.” Mickey O’Connor, “The Humanist: Shonda Rhimes Hones in on Ethical, Moral *Grey Areas,*” *TV Guide* (2009), http://www.tvguide.com (accessed December 7, 2009).

427 Johnson, "The Cutting Edge: Shonda Rhimes Dissects Grey's Anatomy".
for the show. She lets her fans know of her complete control with regularity. Another example comes from season two when a fan favorite character, Denny Duquette, died. Rhimes says that the character had to die and no one could change her mind, not even the studio executive assigned to her show. According to Rhimes, as soon as a given season finale airs, she plans the next season. Her method is to start with the season finale and have the other 23 episodes work to that point. She tells viewers that the season opener contains clues and dialogue for the season finale: “every line of dialogue has a point . . . nothing happens without a reason.” Rhimes’s discussions of narrative control are central to her image as a public creative figure. Besides being in control of the narrative, Rhimes’s persona includes her method of creating the show and hiring the actors. She is an advocate of “colorblind casting.” Rhimes says that she wrote the pilot script for GA without racial or ethnic descriptions for the characters and extended this to the casting stage. Her reasoning behind this method is that she wants to hire the most talented individual for the part. Yet Rhimes received a lot of media attention and some criticism for this method of writing and casting because of her race. It was difficult to imagine that an African American woman in charge would not think about race at all when creating and producing a television series. Like Perry and Banks, Rhimes’s race is always part of her image as a public creative figure.

428 Shonda Rhimes, "The Other Side of This Life," in Grey Matter (2007).
429 Shonda Rhimes, "From Shonda Rhimes (Finally)," in Grey Matter (2006).
431 For more in-depth analysis of Rhimes’s use of colorblind casting see Warner, “Colorblind TV: Prime-time Politics of Race in Television Casting."
3.4.2 Shonda Rhimes- Colorblind Queen

Most of the discourse surrounding Rhimes includes some version of the phrase “one of television’s few black showrunners.” Of the three, she is the only one identified with this label. The immediate success of Grey’s Anatomy put Shonda Rhimes in the spotlight and the discourse surrounding the creator and public creative figure for GA centered on her race and her decision to create and cast the show without racial or ethnic descriptions. Using colorblind casting resulted in creating a diverse ensemble cast.

Rhimes and GA received media attention because of the lack of diversity elsewhere on television and behind the scenes. For the first two seasons, Rhimes’s race and her use of colorblind casting were central in the popular discourse. Almost every interviewer asked Rhimes about race and creating a diverse universe at Seattle Grace Hospital. Rhimes becomes defensive when asked about race on GA and says that she is “a post-feminist, post-civil rights baby . . . where race isn’t necessarily the only thing discussed.” She also admits that she wrote and cast the series without thinking about race or ethnicity. Yet she does have one race rule: no black drug dealers, pimps, or hookers on GA. Rhimes created this rule because she felt that “A lot of shows feel the need and enjoy stereotyping, and we’re going the other way. [Perpetuating stereotypes] isn’t something I’m interested in promoting.”

Of the three public creative figures examined in this chapter, Rhimes is the most defensive when it comes to discussing being an African American in the television industry. She never discusses any inequities she has experienced or observed. She claims:

\[\text{References:}\]

\[434\] Fogel.
The thing I find scary and disturbing about television sometimes is that people think because you’re somebody of color you have to be referred to or defined by your race. It doesn’t really make sense because that’s not how I live my life or how most people live their lives.437

Yet Rhimes is always defined by her race since GA started for two reasons. First, Rhimes was the first African American woman to create and executive produce a drama for broadcast network television. The fact that GA became an instantaneous hit brought Rhimes into the spotlight. Journalists and critics wanted to know more about the person that created the world of Seattle Grace Hospital. Second, race is part of Rhimes’s image because of her use of colorblind casting. During the first two seasons of the show, Rhimes claimed that race did not matter in her creation of the show or the hiring of the cast. She only wanted the best actors for the roles. However, Rhimes did have race in mind for one character: Miranda Bailey. Rhimes originally envisioned the character as a petite blonde because of her nickname: “the Nazi.”438 This contradicts her statements about creating a show without character descriptions or utilizing colorblind casting and indicates how public relations-spin factors in the promotion and publicity for television shows.

It was not until 2009 that Rhimes made any statement about diversity in television. At that time, she told the Hollywood Reporter:

There are plenty of times when I’m watching television and I think ‘Not one of these people looks like me,’ and I think that’s ridiculous in this day and age and honestly a little shameful. It was important to me to have a cast reflect what I think the world looks like.439

This 2009 quote is very different from Rhimes’s stance on race when the show first came out in 2005. Rhimes also told TV Guide in 2009: “A lot of people who are older than me fought

437 O’Connor, "The Humanist: Shonda Rhimes Hones in on Ethical, Moral Grey Areas."
439 Dawn, "Vital Signs."
very hard so that I could get to write a television show and let people just be people." These tensions within her image suggest deeper issues about racial identity and individual power/authority. Like Banks, if Rhimes has experienced any racial discrimination or tension as a key figure behind the scenes, she does not discuss it in interviews or online. For her, any issues or tensions regarding race are in the past. Although Rhimes has a multiracial cast on *GA*, race is barely mentioned on the show.

Though Rhimes has tended to be evasive in terms of race, there have been at least two instances on *GA* in which race, specifically blackness, played a major role in storylines. The first episode involved a white supremacist ambulance driver refusing treatment from the doctors of color at Seattle Grace Hospital. This episode aired during the show’s fourth season in 2007, two years before Rhimes joined Twitter. In the episode, Dr. Bailey ends up operating on the driver and thus saving his life. The second episode occurred during the show’s sixth season, in 2010. The episode focused on the doctors talking about their most trying medical cases/experiences. During a flashback by African American doctor Richard Webber, viewers see that he was the only African American doctor on staff at Seattle Grace Hospital and was not treated as an equal by his peers. When a fan asked about why the white doctors treated Dr. Webber poorly, Rhimes tweeted “Oh! That was supposed to be another example of the diff in way people thought in the 80s.” For Rhimes, this example demonstrates that issues with race are seen as being in the past and support why race is not a big issue in the contemporary world of Seattle Grace Hospital. It also demonstrates how Rhimes uses Twitter to provide fans with behind-the-scenes information and how she constructs her role as a key creative figure.

440 O’Connor, “The Humanist: Shonda Rhimes Hones in on Ethical, Moral Grey Areas.”
3.4.3 Shonda Rhimes: GA PCF or Fan?

In 2009, Rhimes started using Twitter. Rhimes has been on Twitter longer than Banks and Perry, and she uses it more than Perry and Banks to talk about the amount of work she does behind the scenes. From January 2009-December 2010, Rhimes sent out 2,115 tweets. For Rhimes, most of her Twitter posts consist of answering fan questions and legitimizing her role as public creative figure. Most questions are about the characters, but fans are also interested in production details. When one fan asked what happens when Rhimes is needed at the same time on both shows, she responded: “People wait for me.” She also uses the platform to remind fans who is in control. On Twitter, Rhimes posts pictures from table readings and the sets. In February 2010, a fan responded that a photo that Rhimes had posted was from a scene viewers never saw. The fan wanted to know why she would share that photo. Rhimes tweeted back: “Cause I have stuff that you never see.” One fan asked about how much control the writers have and Rhimes tweeted “No one gets free reign but me.” Rhimes also acknowledges that she reads all the responses to her blog posts on Grey Matter, the official blog for the show, and through Twitter she is able to directly answer fan questions. Like Perry, talking about reading fan comments and tweets is part of Rhimes’s persona. As much as she appreciates the fans, she also tells them that their feelings will not influence how she writes the show, which is very different from Perry who claims that his fans influence everything he does.

Rhimes reveals an interesting tension in her image as public creative figure. On the one hand, she wants everyone to know, especially fans, that she is the one in charge. For example,

---

444 Shonda Rhimes, ”No One Gets Free Reign but Me,” (2010).
445 On 29 September 2010, a fan asked if public opinion influences Rhimes. She tweeted “By the time an ep airs, we’re already 10 eps ahead so would be impossible.” Also in September 2010 a fan tweeted they did not like the season opener. Rhimes’s response: “ok.” Shonda Rhimes, ”Ok,” (2010); Shonda Rhimes, ”Public Opinion,” (2010). For more about how much the fans influence Perry see his webpage (http://www.tylerperry.com) or Belloni and Galloway.
she tweeted on 9 March 2009: “What if at the end of this season of Grey’s Anatomy, the hospital just exploded into flames and we don’t know who lives or who dies?”446 She also tweeted a few days later that she works between 85-90 hours a week on both shows.447 Like Banks, Rhimes discusses technical aspects of her job behind the scenes: “locked another cut, put out several fires and wrote, wrote, wrote- and my day is just beginning . . .”448

Yet at the same time, she also tries to act like a fan, which contradicts her image as the one with the power. For example, she told Oprah Winfrey that she does not go down to the soundstages while filming because she wants to remain a fan.449 Rhimes has been presenting herself in this way since the show started with blog posts on Grey Matter, which is located on the official ABC GA webpage. For example in 2006, Rhimes blogged, “I like to keep myself in a kind of stalker-ish fog in which I believe my characters aren’t characters but actual people.”450 On the blog and Twitter, Rhimes writes how scared she is for the characters and apologizes when things go wrong (e.g., a character dies or a couple breaks up). Her apologies state that the characters made her do it. For example, one storyline involved one of the residents, Izzie Stevens, discovering the visions of her dead fiancé are hallucinations caused by tumors in her brain from cancer. Rhimes wrote on Grey Matter that she is scared that Izzie is sick and is “crossing her fingers that Denny [the hallucination who now represents death] goes away.”451 She also agrees with fans when they tweet about how much they miss certain characters on the show. Yet a few weeks or months later she will write that she has no regrets about any decision she has made on

---

446 Shonda Rhimes, "What If at the End of This Season of Grey’s Anatomy, the Hospital Just Exploded into Flames and We Don’t Know Who Lives or Who Dies?,” Twitter (2009). http://www.twitter.com/#!/shondarhimes (accessed March 9, 2009).
449 Winfrey, "Oprah Talks to Shonda Rhimes."
450 Shonda Rhimes, "End of the World as We Know It,” in Grey Matter (2006).
Rhimes also frequently posts that she hates providing any information that might be considered a spoiler but she does it anyway for the fans. However, she teases the fans when she tweets, “Just finished writing GA finale script. All I can say is . . . whew . . .” This causes fans to tweet more questions to Rhimes, which she refuses to answer. Rhimes’s shift from GA fan to GA public creative figure creates an inconsistency in her image as the person in control behind the scenes.

Although Rhimes tweets personal details about her life, her tweets do not contain the approachable tone that Banks and Perry’s tweets do. For example, Rhimes does not sign her tweets with a nickname and she does not self-disclose as much as Perry and Banks. Yet she still tweets enough personal information that fans can connect with her. For instance, Rhimes is a huge fan of the National Spelling Bee and tweets her love for this event every June. In 2009, Rhimes scheduled her vacation at the same time as the spelling bee and shared this with fans: “Just re-read last year’s Bee blog and now officially SAD about going on vacay becuz of how much I love the Bee. The Bee is my Superbowl.” Since 2005, Rhimes has blogged about the National Spelling Bee. The next year Rhimes was not on vacation and tweeted: “Going off Twitter for awhile (except on Jun 3 and 4 when I obsess and do all things National Spelling Bee). Have a great break!” Rhimes tweeted four times about the spelling bee and then did not tweet again.

---

until July 7. Rhimes took a break from Twitter because her shows were on hiatus and fans tweet her constantly asking questions about the next season.\textsuperscript{456}

All three utilize Twitter and other online technologies in the construction of their images as public creative figures. For Perry, a website and emails remain his primary methods for connecting with fans. Generally his tweets provide a link to these messages on his website, but he has only started to use the technology to connect with his fans. Of the three, Banks is the one that uses Twitter the most to share personal details of her life. Shonda Rhimes uses Twitter more formally to provide information to fans about the show. All three use online technologies and publicity to promote their shows and their hard work behind the scenes as key creative figures. The information they provide to journalists through interviews, disclose online through Twitter and blogs, and provide via industry publications and magazines cumulatively create their personas as black public creative figures. As constructions, they embody certain characteristics about racial ideologies in American society.

3.5 Post-Racial or Neo-Racial?

Shonda Rhimes maintains an image of a public creative figure working in a post-racial society in which people are judged on their merit and not the color of their skin. Rhimes downplays race in most of her interviews for the show. She presents being an African American woman as secondary to being a television writer and creator. During the first two seasons, colorblind casting and Rhimes’s discussion of race were at the forefront in the discourse surrounding the show. Almost any article about diversity on television or diversity in ensemble dramas cites \textit{GA} as an excellent case study and notes the fact that Rhimes is African American. She was lauded as an example of diversity on a broadcast network.

\textsuperscript{456} Rhimes states this information in her tweets. For more information see \url{http://www.twitter.com/#!/shondarhimes}. 
What is problematic about Rhimes’s post-racial perspective are the contradictions in her statements regarding race. On the one hand, she wrote and casted the show without race or ethnicity as a focus. Yet, she has a rule that pimps and drug dealers cannot be black. She also created the character of Miranda Bailey with race in mind. On the show, Bailey’s nickname is “the Nazi.” Rhimes is proud of the fact that because of colorblind casting, the role changed from a petite blond with ringlets to an African American woman. Rhimes’s belief in a colorblind society becomes an issue because it falsely reflects an image that race is not an issue and racial inequities are a thing of the past. Yet Rhimes herself, through her public statements, demonstrates that we are not in a post-racial society.

Tyler Perry is more candid than Rhimes when it comes to discussions about race. He acknowledges that things are not created equal in the industry. Perry promotes a neo-racial viewpoint. He speaks openly about the lack of opportunities for African American actors in Hollywood. However, he indicates that these talented actors have an outlet through his works at Tyler Perry Studios. TPS employs many African Americans for roles onscreen and for production in Atlanta. Perry’s studio is the number one employer of African Americans in Hollywood. As the first African American to create and own a fully operational television and film studio, Perry is trying to make a difference. Although he is vocal about the inequities, he also admits that things are better than they were. Things are better in part because of the impact he is making in the industry. For Perry, financial successes have provided him with the means to have a louder voice than Rhimes about inequities in the industry. The $200 million, 100 episode order from TBS provided Perry with a bigger platform and increased media attention. The ratings success and TBS’s additional order for 100 more episodes brought Perry into the forefront as a legitimate

---

457 Certainly behind-the-scenes Perry has made an impact with Tyler Perry Studios, which employs over 300 people in Atlanta. The on-screen representations of blackness in his films and television shows have also had a positive and negative impact, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
public creative figure in television. Also having complete creative control and ownership makes it easier for him to talk about these issues. He is very open about the challenges he had in the television industry before 2005. Network interference and lack of creative control forced Perry to wait to create *House of Payne*.

Perry has had tremendous success with the transition from plays to film to television largely because of his loyal, devoted audience. He acknowledges that the urban faith-based demographic has been overlooked in film and television and he creates shows for this ignored audience. Yet with his television show, he has expanded his audience. *HOP* is geared toward his African American fans but he has broadened the storylines to expand its appeal.\(^\text{458}\) Perry supports a neo-racial perspective through his acknowledgement of inequities and underserved audiences in Hollywood as well as his devotion to creating works to correct this situation. Within the Neo-Cosby Moment, Perry (and not the industry more generally) is the one creating more opportunities for African Americans. In addition, the success of *HOP* resulted in the creation of more black-oriented sitcoms on TBS and other basic cable stations.\(^\text{459}\) However, his success did not transfer to the broadcast networks; there has remained an absence of black-oriented sitcoms on ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, and The CW.

Whereas Rhimes promotes a post-racial perspective and Perry follows a neo-racial viewpoint, Tyra Banks falls somewhere in-between. When talking about the modeling industry, Banks follows a neo-racial perspective; she admits that things are not equal but better than they were. Tyra Banks is similar to Perry in that she wants to correct past injustices. However, these


\(^{459}\) As of this writing, TBS, TV One, BET, and TV Land have at least one black-oriented sitcom. These shows will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.
corrections are limited to modeling. Based on her experience as a model, she strives to promote and celebrate models of all colors, shapes and sizes. *ANTM* has been a successful platform for Banks. On *ANTM*, Banks has created a universe in which a model of any color can win the title of “America’s Next Top Model.” Banks has also shown diversity throughout the cycles from the model-contestants to the experts providing assistance and advice.

When it comes to the television industry, Banks sticks to a post-racial perspective in which race is not an issue at all. One reason for the differences in perspectives could be that Banks is removed from the modeling industry but is starting a new career in the television industry. While Banks modeled some from 2005-2010, she was not dependent on modeling as her only source of revenue. Her status as a supermodel as well as the success of *ANTM* and the *Tyra Banks* show provided her with the financial freedom to be candid about the limitations for working models of color within the world of fashion. She will acknowledge what a big deal it is to showcase models of color but does not recognize the importance of her own role behind the scenes as a woman of color. Like Rhimes, Banks is one of the few successful African American female executive producers in the industry. She is proud that viewers watch the show and see that they can be models too. However, she does not mention how viewers watching could see Banks being a successful woman in television and strive to be that as well. Banks also says her only roadblock to becoming a successful television creator and executive producer was being a model.\(^{460}\) She does not mention the lack of black public creative figures or creators in reality television. In all likelihood, Banks does not discuss these inequities because she has not experienced them. In the Neo-Cosby Moment, Banks is an example of how stardom and celebrity are important to television production. Her success as a model provided an easier transition into tel-

\(^{460}\) Her modeling career gave her an advantage in terms of the show’s concept and working as the host and a judge on *ANTM*. 
evision. Furthermore, Banks demonstrates the importance of reality television in the Neo-Cosby Moment for diversity behind and in front of the camera.

How Banks, Rhimes, and Perry talk about themselves as black public creative figures in the press and through their Twitter accounts and blogs provides information about how American society addresses issues of race in the 2000s. The dominant ideology is a post-racial perspective in which race is not an issue or factor. Rhimes is the public creative figure that most closely follows this perspective. By being post-racial, Rhimes has created a diverse ensemble cast drama. Donald Bogle describes the problem with having an ensemble cast drama that does not discuss race: "Cultural distinctions still exist, even if we don't feel that there is blatant racism in the workplace the way there once was. We don't want to see a racial or cultural problem every week, but at some point if you ignore them it becomes dishonest." The same can also be said about Rhimes’s refusal to discuss race and what it means to be a black public creative figure in an industry in which there are few African Americans in these positions. This is also the case with regard to Banks’s lack of discussion on the topic. Perry’s discussions of inequities and advancements in the industry, meanwhile offer more to discussions and analyses of the role race plays in American society. He also provides a more realistic point of view about race in American society.

3.6 Black Public Creative Figures vs. White Public Creative Figures

Although I have examined Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s discourse as black public creative figures, these three do not operate in isolation. Rather, they work in an industry in which positions of power are dominated by whites. For Banks, Rhimes, and Perry, race is always part of

---

461 Fogel.
462 He offers a more realistic point of view in his discussions about African Americans working in the media industries. Some critics believe that Perry’s onscreen representations of African Americans do not provide a realistic perspective, which I will discuss in length in the next chapter by examining the representations of blackness on HOP.
their image. This is not true for all public creative figures, especially white public creative figures.

Contemporary white counterparts to Banks, Rhimes, and Perry could be seen as Heidi Klum, Matthew Weiner, and Steven Levitan. Klum is the host and executive producer of Project Runway (Bravo, 2004–2008; Lifetime, 2009–), a reality competition about fashion designers. Matthew Weiner is the creator and executive producer for Mad Men (AMC, 2007–), a drama set in a 1960s advertising agency. Steven Levitan is a co-creator and executive producer for Modern Family, a family-oriented sitcom. The discourse surrounding these three figures is very different than Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s discourses in that discussions about their race/ethnicity or racial/ethnic representations on their shows is not part of their image as public creative figures.

Weiner and Rhimes are similar in that both hate revealing spoiler information about their shows and publicly discuss their power behind the scenes. For example, Weiner is known for his lengthy discussions with the props department and set designers about minute details such as what type of headboard the Drapers have in their home. However, Weiner’s discourse centers on his television pedigree (he was a writer and executive producer for The Sopranos) and his contract negotiations for future seasons of Mad Men. One of the few times that Weiner’s race has been discussed was during an Adweek interview in which they asked him to describe himself demographically. Weiner stated that he is a white male in his 40s that makes over $100,000 annually, “I’m a desirable audience.” Weiner does not have to justify why his show only uses the Civil Rights Movement as historical reference points and not as storylines for the show.

---

465 The Civil Rights Movement has become a point of critique on Mad Men, but the issue is not widely discussed. Also Weiner is able to skirt around the issue by stating that it is too early for the Civil Rights Movement to be part of the show’s narrative. For examples of the discourse surrounding Matthew Weiner as a public creative figure see "5 Things to Know About 'Mad Men' Creator Matthew Weiner," Hollywood Reporter (2011).
Heidi Klum and Tyra Banks have a shared history. They both were Victoria’s Secret models and Klum hosts the German version of *ANTM*. *Project Runway* started one year after *ANTM*. Although Klum is the host and an executive producer on *PR*, there is not much in the discourse about her role behind the scenes. During the first year of the show, Klum talked about helping with narrowing down the contestants to the finalists on the show or looking at rough cuts. However, now the discourse on Klum focuses more on her modeling career, clothing lines, marriage (and divorce) to singer Seal, and motherhood. *Project Runway* is only discussed when the show is about to start a new season or when the show has just finished a season. Like Weiner, race is not a topic of discussion for Klum; neither is her nationality.

Steve Levitan’s *Modern Family* is widely credited for reviving the sitcom on ABC and network television. The show is a family sitcom about the interactions of three different types of families. It is ABC’s biggest sitcom hit in years and most of the discourse surrounding Levitan discusses how he made this hit happen for the network. Similar to Weiner, the discourse also examines his television pedigree. Levitan co-created the series with Christopher Lloyd. Both men started working together on the NBC sitcom *Wings* (NBC, 1990-1997). The pair also worked together on *Frasier* (NBC, 1993-2004) and co-created *Back to You* (Fox, 2007-2008). In most interviews, Levitan talks about how much he and Lloyd wanted to create a show with relatable characters and realistic storylines. He also talks about the difficulties of being a showrunner.

---

466 Anne Becker, "Show Me the 'Runway'," *Broadcasting & Cable*, November 29 2004.

467 The absence of race is Klum’s image is interesting because of her marriage (now divorce) to singer Seal who is black. Klum and Seal had three children, and Seal adopted Klum’s daughter from a previous relationship. For examples of the discourse surrounding Heidi Klum see ibid; Melissa Guthrie, "Project Runway," *Hollywood Reporter*, August, 26 2011; David A. Keeps, "Heidi's Full House," *Good Housekeeping*, May 2011; Ramin Setoodeh, "Heidi Klum," *Newsweek*, July 17 2006.
versus a writer. The cast of *Modern Family* is mostly white with the exception of Columbian actress Sofia Vergara. Her character, Gloria Delgado-Pritchett, is also Columbian. However, the ethnicity and representations of the character are not a topic of discussion. Levitan does not have to defend or justify the characters’ actions or behaviors on the show.\(^\text{468}\)

For these white public creative figures, race is not part of their discourse and these figures are able to exist successfully in the world of white privilege. For Banks, Rhimes, and Perry, race is always part of their image because of the burden of representation. Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are exceptions to the rule when it comes to successful African Americans working behind the scenes in the television industry. As members of this small group, they have to represent the entire African American community, which is something their white counterparts do not have to experience. Although it does not come up in every interview, blog, or Twitter, the topic is a constant in their discourse.

### 3.7 Conclusion

Banks, Rhimes, and Perry use control in different ways. Perry portrays himself as being 100% in control of all of his projects. On *HOP*, he works as executive producer and director. Although he does not write episodes, he is in charge of the narrative direction of the show. Rhimes is also in control as executive producer. The biggest example of her control involves storylines and the direction of the narrative. On *Grey Matter* and Twitter, Rhimes constantly asserts her power. She does not like spoilers and refuses to answer questions about future episodes. Banks and Rhimes are frequent users of Twitter. It is not uncommon for both women to tweet several times a day. Banks’s tweets are different from Rhimes because of the difference in the genres they produce. *ANTM* is a reality show competition, and as such, information cannot

---

\(^{468}\) This is also an interesting part of Levitan’s image because the character, Gloria Delgado-Pritchett, is constructed as a “hot Latina.”
be given away. The same could be said for GA, but there are more episodes of the drama than the reality series.

How each presents themselves as black public creative figures reveals the role race plays in our society. When it comes to race, all three lose control in terms of the burden of representation—this is in spite of the fact that each regularly asserts their authority over their work. Because of the lack of African American public creative figures, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry must represent the entire community. Because of the role race plays in our society and the lack of African Americans in the entertainment industry, race will continue to be a part of their images as public creative figures. The fact that their race is discussed in their discourse as public creative figures demonstrates that we are not in a post-racial society and that race does matter when it comes to African Americans in power behind the scenes.

As the creators and executive producers, these three have some control over the images and the narratives presented onscreen, but this is control that exists within larger institutional and cultural constraints. Banks and Rhimes have shows on the broadcast networks, a fact that feeds into the personas they sustain as a public creative figure. Perry’s presence on basic cable, meanwhile, provides him with an image of having complete creative control. This is because basic cable is not held to the same scheduling pressures and business demands placed on the broadcast networks. An additional industrial limitation that is part of their personas is diversity. The lack of diversity within the television industry foregrounds race as part of Rhimes, Banks, and Perry’s images as public creative figures. This also explains why there is a continued emphasis on onscreen representations. While the lack of representations of blackness onscreen is a topic of concern, it is part of a larger problem, which is the lack of African Americans in positions of power behind the scenes. This is why Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are important case stud-
ies. They provide a connection between the industrial context and representations of blackness in the text. How Banks, Rhimes, and Perry negotiate their roles as black public creative figures into how racial representations are presented in their texts, the focus of the next chapter.

4 BLACKNESS IN THE TEXT: A REPRESENTATIONAL ANALYSIS OF GREY’S ANATOMY, HOUSE OF PAYNE, AND AMERICA’S NEXT TOP MODEL

4.1 Introduction

One refreshing aspect of “A.N.T.M.” is that there is more diversity among the contestants than one usually sees in reality shows. Nancy Franklin, New Yorker

Although medical shows have become the cough syrup of television - sturdy, dependable and widely available - "Grey's Anatomy" has differentiated itself by creating a diverse world of doctors - almost half the cast are men and women of color - and then never acknowledging it. Matthew Fogel, New York Times

Mr. Perry does seek to turn one stereotype on its head, though: the view that African-American families are imperiled by the bad habits of the men who lead them. In “House of Payne” the men are steadfast, committed and hard-working. Ginia Bellafante, New York Times

The above quotes are media critics’ reviews of America’s Next Top Model, Grey’s Anatomy, and House of Payne upon the initial broadcast of each show. A common thread in all three reviews is diversity on the programs. Most reviews about ANTM and GA have praised the amount of diversity on the reality show and medical drama. The above review for HOP ap-

---

470 Fogel.
plauded the show for not reinforcing a particular stereotype regarding black men. Yet Bellafante’s review of *HOP* was very different from most reviews about the black-oriented sitcom. For example, Robert Bianco, a critic for *USA Today*, wrote that the show “isn’t just the worst sitcom of the year, it’s one of the worst of the modern era. . . [a] horrendous mish-mash of old jokes and ugly stereotypes.”

In the previous chapter, I explored how Shonda Rhimes, Tyler Perry, and Tyra Banks represent themselves as public creative figures to the media and their fans. Their identity as public creative figures is connected with the texts they have created. In this chapter, I explore how blackness is presented on *America’s Next Top Model, Grey’s Anatomy*, and *House of Payne*. On *GA*, blackness is used as window dressing to make the show look like a diverse ensemble cast while maintaining its narrative focus on the show’s leading (white) character, Meredith Grey. For black models on *ANTM*, blackness is used to make themselves a unique commodity, but their uniqueness must work within the modeling industry’s (white) standard of beauty. *HOP* struggles with the stigma of stereotypical representations of African Americans, which overshadows the fact that the sitcom contains a diverse cast with a variety of representations (negative and positive).

Whereas the original Cosby Era was generically limited to the black-oriented sitcom, this new moment represents significant developments for dramas and reality television. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, both programming types can be either black-oriented or blackFeatured show. Black-oriented shows consist of a predominantly African American cast or an African American actor is the star of the show. A blackFeatured show has at least one African American character that is relevant to the show’s narrative. For example, *House of Payne* is a black-oriented show because the show focuses on the Paynes, an African American family living in Atlanta. *America’s Next Top Model* and *Grey’s Anatomy* are blackFeatured shows. The

---

472 Bianco.
casts on both series feature African Americans but they are not the stars of the show. Although Tyra Banks is the host and a judge on *ANTM*, the episodes are about the models and their challenges for the week. Banks mostly appears in the last 20 minutes of the show for the judging and elimination.\(^{473}\) On *Grey’s Anatomy*, there are three African American doctors who work at Seattle Grace Hospital, but the show mainly focuses on Meredith Grey, the series’ title character who is white. Most of the major storylines are connected to her.

From 2005-2010, the broadcast networks shifted from black-oriented shows that foregrounded African American performers to black-featured shows in which African Americans (and other actors of color) were a part of multicultural ensemble casts. As discussed in Chapter Two, the limited presence of black-oriented shows on the networks during this period resulted in fewer African Americans in positions of power behind the scenes. Nonetheless, in spite of these worsening industrial conditions for blacks, Shonda Rhimes and Tyra Banks continued to be successful. At the same time, the lack of black-oriented sitcoms on the broadcast networks provided select basic cable outlets with an opportunity to bring fans of this programming form to their channels. *HOP* was a ratings success for TBS in part because it was one of the few black-oriented sitcoms on television. These industrial conditions shaped how blackness is presented on *GA, ANTM, and HOP*.

Examining representations of blackness on these three shows is important because of the impact these shows have on society. Millions of viewers watch *ANTM, GA, and HOP*. How they present blackness affects viewers. All three shows are also part of a transitional moment in the history of race and representation on television: the early stages of the Neo-Cosby Moment (2005-2010). Culturally, race is also in a period of transition. As discussed in Chapter One, the

\(^{473}\) There is usually on episode in each cycle in which Banks is the photographer for the weekly photo shoot. While Banks receives more screen time than usual in this episode, she is talking about working with the model-contestants.
terms colorblindness and post-racial are too complicated and ineffective to use in contemporary discussions about race in American society. The terms suggest that race is not an issue anymore and that everyone has the same opportunities for advancement and success. In Chapter One, I argue that media scholars should instead adapt Ralph Banks’s term “neo-racial” in their examinations of race. For Banks, this term is a better framework for scholars than post-racial or color-blind because it acknowledges that racial inequities still exist and requires scholars to explore the historical, social, and political contexts surrounding race in the United States in more complex terms. In this dissertation, I have been exploring Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry using a neo-racial lens. Chapter Two examined the industrial context, and in Chapter Three, I examined how Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry represent themselves as public creative figures in television. These three have the additional burden of being black public creative figures in an industry in which diversity behind the scenes remains problematic. When it comes to discussing her role as a black public creative figure in the television industry, Rhimes maintain a post-racial ideology in which race is not an issue. Tyra Banks also maintains a post-racial ideology unless the topic of discussion is the modeling industry. When talking about her experiences in modeling, Banks adheres to a neo-racial discourse in which she acknowledges the industry can be challenging for a model of color. Perry maintains a neo-racial ideology in his discussions about his role as a public creative figure and talks about a lack of diversity onscreen and behind the scenes in television. While Banks and Rhimes rarely discuss race and the television industry, Perry shares in interviews and through his website and Twitter that he is providing opportunities for African Americans that Hollywood is not. However, he sees things are improving and better than they once were. Perry contributes directly to this change by hiring more African Americans to work on his projects.\textsuperscript{474}

\textsuperscript{474} Though notably there are controversies about his employing nonunion labor.
In my analysis of Banks, Rhimes, and Perry, I have not yet explored directly the shows they produce. Each has created a successful prime-time television program watched by millions of viewers every week. As previously discussed, Banks’s America’s Next Top Model, Rhimes’s Grey’s Anatomy, and Perry’s House of Payne are important shows to The CW, ABC, and TBS. The popularity of GA, ANTM, and HOP resulted in Rhimes, Banks, and Perry becoming the public creative figures for these shows. For Rhimes, the immediate success of GA pushed her into the media spotlight and being identified as its central producer. Although Banks and Perry were celebrities before their television shows, the ratings successes of ANTM and HOP shifted the focus from their previous endeavors and identified them as public creative figures working in television. In addition, as the quotes at the beginning of this chapter demonstrate, the shows received media attention largely because of their diverse casts and representations of characters of color.

Jason Mittell (2010) supports the contention that there is a connection between the creative figure and representations in the text. He claims “we can better understand the ways television presents meanings and constructs identities by examining the negotiations between various creative practices and institutional pressures.” He acknowledges that making the connection between how the producers’ identity shapes representation can be a challenge because television is a collaborative medium. Yet we can see this connection between Banks, Rhimes, and Perry and ANTM, GA, and HOP because control is a prevalent theme in their images as public creative figures and in related media coverage of them. As discussed in the last chapter, all three claim that they are in charge of their shows and responsible for what viewers see onscreen. Perry has no institutional pressures because he has complete creative control over HOP. Although

---

475 Jason Mittell, Television and American Culture (New York Oxford University Press, 2010), 306.
476 Ibid., 307.
477 Ibid., 306.
Rhimes works on a broadcast network, she claims she is not swayed by network executives’ suggestions about changing certain storylines (e.g., not killing a fan-favorite character). As an executive producer and judge on *ANTM*, Banks has a tremendous influence on which model-contestants are sent home each week. Moreover, we can see these connections through a representational analysis of the text. Mittell recommends not examining representations in isolation but within the context of the entire show. He argues this type of scholarship is important because:

> Representations of identity help define what a culture thinks is normal for a particular group, how behaviors and traits fit into a society’s shared common sense. Such representations also directly impact how we think about ourselves: when television constructs norms for a group we belong to, we might compare our own behavior to that representation; when it represents a group different from ourselves, television can shape how we view other people.  

Mittell’s suggestion also supports Ralph Banks’s call for examining the historical and cultural context in exploring racial matters in American society. In a neo-racial, Neo-Cosby Moment, representations of blackness on television still have tremendous impact and influence over viewers. For example all three shows have been nominated for NAACP Image Awards, which acknowledge “the outstanding achievements and performances of people of color in the arts . . . as well as the exemplary works by, for, and relevant to people of color.” However, like their public creative figures, *GA*, *ANTM*, and *HOP* have the burden of representation due to the stagnation and regression of diversity onscreen on broadcast and cable.

---

478 Ibid.
479 *HOP* and *GA* have won best drama and sitcom NAACP Image Awards. *GA* has also won Image Awards for writing. Actors on both shows have won also. While nominated multiple times, *ANTM* has not won an Image Award for best reality show. "NAACP Image Awards", NAACP http://www.naacpimageawards.net/ (accessed September 11 2012). Also *GA* and *ANTM* have been honored by GLAAD.
4.2 Examining Representations of Blackness on Television

As discussed in Chapter One, Herman Gray provides a useful lens for examining racial representations of blackness on prime-time television. Gray categorizes African American representation on prime-time television during the 1980s and early 1990s. He claims that these representations fall into three categories: assimilationist, pluralist, and multiculturalist. With assimilationist shows, African American characters are assimilated into a white middle-class universe. They are completely removed from the African American community. In these shows, the race of the character is only addressed when there is an issue, usually presented as a “very special” episode. Pluralist programs are similar to assimilationist programs in that they both construct worlds from a white middle-class perspective. According to Gray, pluralist shows are mostly black-oriented sitcoms in which the African American characters are “separate but equal.” These shows acknowledge and celebrate that there are racial differences but they do not explain why there is a difference or the social, historical, political, or cultural context for these differences. Gray’s final category, multiculturalist, is his preferred type of televisual representation of blackness because these shows provide more diversity in terms of subject matter and in how blackness is presented. For Gray, it is not that multicultural programs are better than assimilationist or pluralist shows in terms of individual representations of blackness. Instead multicultural shows provide more than the other two because they “represent questions of diversity within blackness more directly, explicitly, and frequently, and as central features of the programs.”

Herman Gray’s categories have been a useful tool for examining representations of blackness on prime-time television because they have helped scholars move beyond the positive/negative stereotype dichotomy and allowed for a deeper examination of these representations by exploring the context surrounding them. However, his terms are outdated (Banet-
Weiser 2007; Henderon 2001). Gray’s framework applies to 1980s and early 1990s television and is primarily applicable to only black-oriented sitcoms because that was the prevalent program type for representations of blackness during this period.

Yet as Fleetwood (2007) admits, coming up with new terminology is challenging:

Since Herman Gray’s seminal first book . . . several works in black cultural studies have attempted to provide new frameworks for understanding the complexity of black representational practices. Yet the questions posed by Gray remain central to much of the scholarship in black cultural studies even a decade later.  

Fleetwood’s assessment is correct. As scholars, we continue to use Gray’s terms because the same representations continue to resonate in contemporary representations of blackness on television. We can see through other analyses, such as DJ Thornton’s (2010) work on Psych (USA), that much of what Gray talks about remains useful even if the framework needs to be revised for the contemporary television context.

Thornton’s analysis of Psych examines representations of blackness within the context of the entire series. Psych is an hour-long comedy about Shawn Spencer, a white fake psychic detective, working with the local police department to solve cases every week. The only people who know that Shawn is not really a psychic are his father Henry, a retired police detective, and his best friend Gus, who works with Shawn on the cases and is black. Thornton argues the show depoliticizes race through Shawn and Gus’s interracial friendship. Thornton believes the show is an assimilationist program because Gus is removed from the African American community and his blackness is used as a comedic device. On the show, Shawn uses Gus’s blackness as a resource for humor. However, Gus never uses Shawn’s whiteness as a source of humor. The series uses the intimacy of the interracial friendship between Shawn and Gus to “exclude attention

---

to historical and structural dimensions of racial injustice.\textsuperscript{482} In her analysis of seasons 1-4, Thornton found that the overall mood of the show concerning race is to use the interracial friendship as a device to exclude any discussions of race.

Thornton’s examination of Psych is useful for two reasons. First, her identification of Psych as an assimilationist program demonstrates that Gray’s terms remain an important frame for media scholars to understand representations of blackness. Second, Thornton uses specific examples throughout the show’s first four seasons to explain how blackness and race are presented overall throughout the series. I utilize the same approach for examining how blackness is presented on America’s Next Top Model, Grey’s Anatomy, and House of Payne.

Thornton’s findings also complicate Gray’s terminology. Gus is assimilated into the white culture on Psych but the show does not use the topic of race as a “very special” episode. Thornton states that Psych is an adaptation and extension of an assimilationist show because the show is an hour long, does not contain a laugh track, and is a hybrid comedy-detective show. So how do Herman Gray’s terms fit into contemporary examinations of representations of blackness on television? In the following sections I examine representations of blackness on Grey’s Anatomy, House of Payne, and America’s Next Top Model using and adjusting Gray’s terms to fit the contemporary moment. I am using these terms because in Chapter Two, I argue that we are not in the emerging post-network era but remain in a late stage of the multi-channel transition in terms of racial representation. The multi-channel transition occurred from mid 1980s-2000s; Gray’s analysis looks at shows in the 1980s and early 1990s. Using Gray’s terms also provides me with a way of connecting all three shows by exploring how blackness is presented narratively on each program. I also use his terms because traces of the Cosby Moment remain in this new

phase of representations of blackness, which I have identified as the Neo-Cosby Moment. I am interested in seeing if there is a greater variation in the types of blackness presented onscreen. Gray’s framework provides a means of addressing the textual links to earlier shows as well as the adaptation and extension of blackness between the early and late stages of the multi-channel transition representationally. Using my personal archive and online archives, I am looking at seasons 1-6 of *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005-2010) and *House of Payne* (2007-2010) and cycles 1-15 of *America’s Next Top Model* (2003-2010).

My goal with this chapter is to extend Gray’s historical analysis of blackness on television by examining how blackness is presented on *ANTM*, *GA*, and *HOP* in the Neo-Cosby Moment from 2005-2010. *GA*, *HOP*, and *ANTM* are interesting case studies to explore the connection between industrial shifts and representations of blackness on television. *ANTM* and *GA* represent how diversity is presented on broadcast network television in the Neo-Cosby Moment: the multicultural ensemble drama and reality show. *HOP* represents the transition of black-oriented sitcoms to basic cable. All three shows also present representational changes in blackness from Gray’s analysis of 1980s/1990s representations, but these are differences of degree. *GA* has a diverse world of doctors, but the show is assimilationist because representations of blackness on the program are limited. However, the show modifies the assimilationist, “very special” episode format. Although Bellafante believes *HOP* is full of stereotypes, I argue the show is a multiculturalist program because it examines issues from multiple positions of class and economics. The show’s serialization of narrative storylines adds a different layer to analysis beyond that posed by Gray. *ANTM* contains more diversity than other reality programs, but its representations of blackness are challenging because it is both an assimilationist and multiculturalist program in
which the models of colors must embody their uniqueness while also adhering to the fashion industry’s (white) standards of beauty.

4.3 Textual Descriptions

4.3.1 Grey’s Anatomy

*Grey’s Anatomy* is a medical drama set in the fictional Seattle Grace Hospital. Despite the show’s diverse ensemble cast, the primary focus is on Dr. Meredith Grey (Ellen Pompeo) and her on-again-off-again romance with Dr. Derek Shepherd (Patrick Dempsey), both of whom are white. Dr. Grey starts the surgical program with five other interns: George O’Malley (T.R. Knight), Alex Karev (Justin Chambers), Izzie Stevens (Katherine Heigl), and Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh). During the first two seasons, the interns are under the guidance of Dr. Bailey (Chandra Wilson), a senior resident in the program. As surgical interns, they work with Dr. Shepherd (Patrick Dempsey), a neurosurgeon, Dr. Preston Burke (Isaiah Washington), a cardiothoracic surgeon, and the chief of surgery, Dr. Richard Webber (James Pickens, Jr.). The multicultural ensemble cast drama started with nine characters, but by the sixth season the cast had expanded to 13 characters. During six seasons, the series has had four African American doctors: Webber, Bailey, Burke, and Jackson Avery (Jesse Williams), an intern. Drs. Webber, Bailey, and Burke were part of the original cast. Burke’s character left the show at the end of season five, Kimberly Elise played Dr. Swinder, an oncologist at Seattle Grace. Dr. Swinder only appeared in three episodes. She was part of Izzie Stevens’ cancer storyline. Season 6 introduced a new African American intern, Dr. Avery. This was the first time since season three that the series had three African American actors in the ensemble cast.

---

483 Additional characters on the show are surgeons Dr. Mark Sloan (plastics), Dr. Arizona Robbins (pediatrics), Dr. Addison Montgomery-Shepherd (OB/GYN), and Dr. Erica Hahn (cardiothoracic). Another resident on the show that interacts with the interns is Dr. Callie Torres.

484 This is the list of characters of color at the beginning of season 7. In seasons 1-3, *GA* had three African American characters in its ensemble cast: the chief of surgery (Dr. Webber), an attending cardiothoracic surgeon (Dr. Burke), and a resident (Dr. Bailey). At the end of season three, Dr. Burke left Seattle Grace, and the show has not brought in another African American doctor as a series regular. Near the end of season five, Kimberly Elise played Dr. Swinder, an oncologist at Seattle Grace. Dr. Swinder only appeared in three episodes. She was part of Izzie Stevens’ cancer storyline. Season 6 introduced a new African American intern, Dr. Avery. This was the first time since season three that the series had three African American actors in the ensemble cast.
of the third season after he decided not to marry Cristina on their wedding day.\footnote{Dr. Burke left Seattle Grace because in real life actor Isaiah Washington’s contract was not renewed for a fourth season. During season three, Washington, in a fight with actor Patrick Dempsey, used a homophobic slur.} Avery’s character joined the staff of Seattle Grace in season six.

4.3.2 *House of Payne*

*House of Payne* is a black-oriented sitcom. Curtis (LaVan Davis), a fire chief and Payne family patriarch, lives across the street from the firehouse with his wife Ella (Cassi Davis). As mentioned in Chapter One, Curtis and Ella’s nephew, C.J. (Allen Payne), moves in with his wife Janine (Demetria McKinney) and two children Jazmine (China Anne McClain) and Malik (Larryramie "Doc" Shaw) after their house burns down. Once C.J.’s family moves in with Curtis and Ella, there are three generations of Paynes living in the same home. An additional complication occurs when the Paynes discover that Janine is a crack addict and responsible for the house fire.

In season three, *House of Payne* added another Payne to the family when Calvin started dating and eventually marries Miranda Lucas (Keisha Knight Pulliam). By season four, Janine and C.J. have remarried and added two more Paynes, with the birth of twins Hayden and Jayden. In season five, Calvin also extends the Payne family. He discovers he has a son (Calvin Jr.) from a previous relationship and his wife Miranda is pregnant.\footnote{Miranda and Calvin’s son Christian is born in the season seven opener, which aired in March 2011, which is outside the scope of my analysis (2005-2010).} In addition to the Payne household, storylines involve the fire station, the kids’ school, the Payne men’s favorite barber shop, and a church help center where Ella and her neighbor, Claretha Jenkins (Denise Burse), volunteer.

4.3.3 *America’s Next Top Model*

*America’s Next Top Model* is a reality-competition show in which models compete for the title of “America’s Next Top Model.” The title comes with a modeling contract, a cover and
spread in *Seventeen* magazine, and a $100,000 contract with Cover Girl cosmetics. It differs from other reality competitions because the show airs in cycles, not seasons. New cycles appear every fall and spring. From 2003-2010, there were 15 cycles. Each cycle consists of 12-13 hour-long episodes. In the first episode of every cycle, Banks and the casting panel, which consists of *ANTM* runway coach J. Alexander and *ANTM* creative director Jay Manuel, meets with 30-35 semifinalists and selects the models that will be part of the competition. In this episode, there are two elimination rounds. In the first round, the competition is narrowed down to 20 models. During the second round, the casting panel selects the 12-13 finalists. Photo shoots are also part of each round. The casting panel selects the finalists based on their photographs and interviews. Once the finalists are selected, the models move to a home in New York or Los Angeles, which contains a runway for practicing and photos of Banks and past *ANTM* winners, and the competition begins.

Each episode involves a challenge, in which the models compete for prizes, and a photo shoot, which determines the models that will continue on in the competition. The photographs are used during the judges’ panel, which consists of Banks and 3-4 other judges. The judges critique the photos and briefly interact with the model-contestants before and during the critique. Every week, the judges eliminate one model. A key episode in each cycle is makeover day, which consists of changes to their hair, as determined by Banks, to make them look more like professional models. Once the competition is down to six models, the model-contestants leave

---

487 For cycle one, the prize was a contract with Revlon cosmetics and a spread in *Marie Claire* magazine. In cycle 2, the contract was with Sephora and a spread in *Jane* magazine. Cycle three started the contract with Cover Girl cosmetics, but the magazine spread was in *Elle*, which continued through cycle six. The *Seventeen* cover and spread started in cycle seven, and lasted until cycle 14. In cycle 15, the magazine changed to *Vogue Italia*.

488 The number of finalists varies by cycle.

489 Also the challenges relate to the weekly photo shoot.

490 The *ANTM* judging panel consists of at least 3 regular judges (including Banks) and one special guest judge. The guest judge generally ties into the photo shoot for that week such as a photographer or fashion designer. Banks is the only judge that has been with the series since cycle one.
the house and travel to an international destination. The cycle-finale episode consists of three models participating in one last photo shoot, which determines the final two that will walk the runway in a live fashion show. Their runway performance as well as their photography portfolio from the entire cycle is used by the judges to determine a winner. Out of 15 cycles, there has been only one “special” cycle of \textit{ANTM}. For cycle 13 (2009), all of the model-contestants were 5’7” and under, which is considered short by industry standards. Generally \textit{ANTM} selects at least two black models for the top 13. In addition to Banks, there have been two African American judges on the show. In 2005, J. Alexander became a judge. Alexander has been part of \textit{ANTM} since the first cycle as a runway coach. He is known on the show as Ms. J.\footnote{On the show, J. Alexander is known as Ms. J, and Jay Manuel is known as Mr. Jay. This started in cycle one when one of the models had trouble differentiating between J. and Jay. She called him Ms. J because he dressed in skirts and wears high heels while teaching the models how to walk.} Alexander was a judge for cycles 5-13. In 2009, Alexander was replaced on the judging panel by Andre Leon Talley, an editor-at-large for \textit{Vogue}.\footnote{Talley judged cycles 14-17.}

4.4 \textit{Blackness on Grey’s Anatomy}

\textit{Grey’s Anatomy} is an assimilationist program because it rarely acknowledges or discusses race or, more specifically, blackness. The show represents a post-racial world in which race does not matter at all— that is consistent with the post-racial ideology presented by Rhimes. Blackness is used on \textit{GA} as window dressing to demonstrate diversity and how multicultural prime-time television has become. Hye Seung Chung (2008) argues that on \textit{Grey’s Anatomy} Cristina Yang has assimilated into the white world of Seattle Grace Hospital. The character rarely identifies herself as Korean, and the show completely removes her from any situation involving her ethnicity. Chung argues that “Cristina’s invisibility as a Korean is why she is the
most visible Asian American character in popular culture today. Chung’s claim is also applicable to the African American characters (Webber, Burke, and Bailey) on Grey’s Anatomy. For example, during seasons 1-3, Cristina was in a relationship with Dr. Burke. As with any relationship on a drama series, the couple went through several crises such as when Yang became pregnant and lost the baby or when Burke was shot at the end of the second season. The couple also went through normal relationship issues such as his objection to the fact that she was a slob while he was highly organized. Yet one concern that never came up during their entire 60-episode relationship was race. For Burke and Yang, being in an interracial relationship was not an issue even when it came to differences in religion, marriage, or family. As Kristen Warner (2010) points out in her analysis of Grey’s Anatomy, when Burke’s mother meets Cristina for the first time, Mrs. Burke does not have a problem with the fact that Cristina is Korean. Instead Mrs. Burke is more upset over Yang’s loose morals and selfishness.

On GA, the black doctors at Seattle Grace are completely removed from the African American community and their racial differences are almost completely invisible. They have assimilated into the white world of Seattle Grace Hospital. A defining feature of an assimilationist program is to use race narratively as a “very special” episode. Throughout the series, GA incorporates race through “very special” episodes, in which the assimilationist/post-racial world of Seattle Grace is temporarily disrupted. The best example of this occurs in the season four two-part episode, “Crash Into Me” (2007). In the two-part episode, an ambulance driver crashes into another ambulance in the ER bay. Two paramedics (Stan and Roy) were severely injured,


494 In the season three episode, Cristina meets Burke’s parents for the first time in his hospital room where he is recovering from a gunshot wound. Burke’s parents see Cristina for the first time wearing nothing but lingerie. Also when Mrs. Burke requests a coffee date with Cristina, Cristina forces Burke to leave his hospital bed and meet them. After the lingerie and coffee incident, Mrs. Burke calls Cristina selfish. Ibid; Warner.

495 Part one aired on November 22 and part two aired on December 6, 2007.
the ambulance driver (Mary) has a brain tumor (which caused the accident), and her partner, Shane, has minor injuries but creates additional problems in the ER. Additional medical cases include a patient with an almost exposed carotid artery and a heart patient with complications from a previous surgery.

“Crash Into Me: Part I” marked the first time viewers saw Bailey’s home life. Viewers had seen Bailey’s husband, Tucker, and child, Tucker, Jr., before, but never outside the hospital. At the beginning of the episode, Bailey is with her family in the kitchen. Tucker is making breakfast while their son is in his highchair and Bailey is completing hospital schedules. Viewers immediately see that this at first seemingly idyllic setting is flawed, as Bailey and Tucker start to fight. Tucker states that Bailey is never home. Viewers also learn that Tucker volunteered to be a stay-at-home dad but is now unhappy with the situation. Not wanting to fight in front of the baby, Bailey suggests that Tucker meet her at the hospital at noon for lunch. Bailey will be very late for this lunch because of the complications with Shane’s case.

In the episode, Shane refuses to have Bailey assess his injuries. At first Bailey thinks Shane is resisting treatment because she is a woman. It takes Dr. Webber, who is older and has experienced racism to identify that Shane does not want to be treated by black doctors:

Shane: I want a different doctor. I’ll wait for a different doctor. 
Bailey: A different doctor? 
Webber: You mean you want a white doctor.

Because two EMTs (Stan and Roy) are trapped upside down in an ambulance with severe injuries, Webber does not have time to deal with Shane and leaves Bailey in charge of the situation. While waiting for a white doctor, Bailey comes up with the idea of using Cristina Yang to examine Shane. Bailey pulls Yang from working with the new cardiothoracic surgeon (who replaced her ex-fiancé Burke) on a critical case. Bailey tells Yang she requested her because
“You’re not black but you’re not white either.” Shane reluctantly agrees to let Yang examine him; viewers then discover that Shane has a large swastika tattoo on his abdomen. His injuries also require surgery. Yang attempts to get off of Shane’s case by telling Bailey about her stepfather’s parents being in a concentration camp. However, Bailey tells Yang: “If I have to work on this man so do you . . . You and I will do this. We will do this and we will consider ourselves having risen above. We’ll rise above.”

Bailey ends up performing the surgery, but she must adhere to Shane’s wishes by having one white doctor, George O’Malley, in the operating room. When Tucker arrives for lunch, Bailey is in the middle of Shane’s surgery. As she is scrubbing out of surgery, there are complications, which require a second surgery. Bailey sends O’Malley to tell Tucker the news that she will be very late to lunch. While in the middle of surgery, Bailey comments that she could not have lunch with her husband because she is “knee-deep in a Nazi’s gut.” After making that comment she realized that she has something in common with Shane: her nickname. She then tells Yang, O’Malley, and the rest of the operating room that “no one better ever call me Nazi again.” After several visits from O’Malley (because of additional complications in surgery), Tucker has enough and leaves the hospital.

This two-part episode, one of the few to explicitly address race, fulfills Gray’s requirements of an assimilationist program and is representative of how race is handled throughout the series. In the instances where race is foregrounded, the show addresses the topic as an individual problem that requires the assistance of the white characters on the show. Also the fact that it takes the show four seasons to discuss race underscores that GA is an assimilationist program. However, the episode also demonstrates some differences from Herman Gray’s original description of an assimilationist program. First, it is a character of color and not a white character that

---

learns a valuable lesson about race. By trying to rise above and not be like Shane, she brings the topic of race into the world of Seattle Grace, thereby violating the post-racial order at the hospital. In this episode, Bailey fails as a black woman, surgeon, wife, and resident.

First, Bailey is shown as failing as a black woman because she does not realize that Shane is refusing treatment because of her race. She does not even realize it is about race until Dr. Webber says something. Throughout the series, Webber has been a mentor to Bailey. As chief of surgery, he created a colorblind/post-racial environment in which Bailey did not have to experience the discrimination and prejudices he did. Yet viewers do not understand the obstacles Webber overcame being a black doctor in the 1980s until the season six episode, “The Time Warp” (2010), which will be discussed in a subsequent section. In fact, Webber and Bailey never discuss the Shane situation in the episode. Webber leaves her for another case (the EMTs trapped in the ambulance). Bailey also must ask a white attending, Derek Shepherd, to borrow George O’Malley. When she tells Shepherd why she needs O’Malley, he tells her that she does not have to do this and it is well within her rights to assign this case to another doctor. Instead Bailey states she must work on him because if she does not she will be just like him. Bailey claims she will rise above. Her emphasis on the phrase “rise above” directly refers to race. The phrase was used throughout the Civil Rights Movement; activists would rise above the violence. It also connects to a Martin Luther King, Jr. quote, “An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.”

Bailey thinks that performing this surgery is a step in the right direction, but her decision has a tremendous impact on her professional and personal life beyond this specific epi-

---

The long-term serialized narrative consequences of Bailey’s actions are another point of
difference from Herman Gray’s definition of an assimilationist program.\footnote{498}

Before going into surgery, this was a complicated case because Shane is a white suprema-
cist. Once in surgery, Shane has several medical complications. Throughout the series, Bailey
tells her interns that they have to separate the personal from the medical and that one wrong
move in the operating room could kill their patients. Yet her need to rise above compromised
Shane’s surgery. Bailey could not leave those feelings in the scrub room, which is seen before
Bailey begins to operate. She stands next the patient with her eyes closed for several moments.
When O’Malley asks what she is doing, Bailey tells him that she is praying: “I’m calling on Je-
sus this time. Don’t bother me when I’m calling on Jesus. I don’t do it very often. He might not
hear me.” Moreover, Bailey’s first surgery is not successful. Shane has additional complications
and requires an immediate second surgery, which Bailey also performs.

Bailey’s professional issues are shown as connected to her personal issues. She failed as
a wife because she put the patient and saving his life above her marriage. During surgery, she is
in a fight with her husband. She sends O’Malley outside the operating room several times with
messages for Tucker. Eventually Tucker grows tired of waiting and leaves the hospital. In her
last scene in the episode, she reveals that is easier to stay at the hospital and wait for Tucker to
fall asleep. This is an unusual statement from Bailey. On \textit{GA}, Bailey’s nickname is the “Nazi”
because she is blunt and not easily intimidated. Yet during the surgery, Bailey states that no one
can call her by that nickname again. Once she makes that statement, she shows her vulnerability
and loses her toughness.

\footnote{498 Tucker appears in two more episodes in season four. In both episodes, he fights with Bailey. By the
direct of season four, Bailey gives up one of her responsibilities at the hospital, running the Denny Duquette free clin-
ic, to save her marriage. In the season five finale, Bailey tells Webber that her marriage is over.}

\footnote{499 I elaborate more about \textit{GA}’s deviations from the assimilationist, very special episode format on p. 189.}
Narratively, the expectation was that Bailey would set the white supremacist straight about his worldview, but it was O’Malley, a white doctor, that ends up defending Dr. Bailey to the patient. On GA, Dr. Bailey is known for her speeches and one-liners that put residents and attendings in their place, but in this episode, she does not put Shane in his place. Bailey only makes one snarky comment to Shane, which occurs before she renounces her nickname. O’Malley is the one to put Shane in his place. He asks Shane how he can work with Mary, a black EMT (who also caused the accident). Shane replies it is a belief system. He can work with Mary, but if she wanted to marry his brother then he would have a problem. O’Malley reminds him that a black woman saved his life today and tells Shane: “If I’d been alone in that OR you’d probably be dead right now. And since we’re sharing belief systems, I believe if you were dead the world would be a better place.” Not only does George present a “Bailey speech” to Shane, but also Bailey receives her own “Bailey speech.” The fact that George, not Bailey, is the one to lecture Shane reinforces GA as an assimilationist program because “the privileged subject position is necessarily that of the white middle class.” In this case, it is Dr. George O’Malley telling Shane, an EMT, that his intolerance is unacceptable. Yet the fact that Bailey, a character of color, also receives a lecture, from Cristina Yang, shows a deviation in the “very special” episode format.

Bailey also fails as a resident because of her decision to use Cristina Yang on the case. On GA, Bailey is usually the moral compass and provides speeches that make the interns, residents, and attendings realize the error of their ways. Yet in this episode, Bailey is the one that

500 While waiting on Yang, Shane comments that he is really hurt and needs help. Bailey replies, “You just lie there and try not to die. Someone will be here soon to save the master race from extinction.”
502 Gray, Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness 86.
 messed up, and Yang is the one to provide the speech to her. At the end of the day, Bailey is proud that she and Cristina “rose above.” Cristina told Bailey:

Yang: You know I rose above too today.
Bailey: Yes you did.
Yang: Pulling me off Hahn’s surgery was an abuse of power. You needed help? Okay. But you used me because the color of my skin. You compromised the quality of my education because of my color? I resent it.  

In this scene, it is not one doctor of color chastising another doctor of color. As Chung states, Cristina has fully assimilated into the whiteness of Seattle Grace and does not identify herself as Korean. Again, by rising above, Bailey compromised her marriage and Cristina’s education. It also demonstrates that she is not as assimilated as Yang. Her non-assimilation is reinforced by her absence in the rest of the episode. Viewers do not see her go home to a sleeping Tucker or get into a fight with him. Yet Yang and O’Malley are featured in the last ten minutes of this episode. First Yang interacts with her intern, Lexie Grey, taking Lexie to Meredith’s house to drink. Then O’Malley is shown breaking up with Izzie Stevens. The final shot of the episode is Meredith, Lexie, Cristina, Izzie, and George all dancing in Meredith’s living room.

The episode demonstrates that GA adheres to and deviates from the very special episode format. Shane is not seen again at Seattle Grace Hospital. This is striking because the show is known for often using the same actors as recurring background characters. Shane’s partner, Mary, does not appear again either. However, Roy, one of the other EMTs injured in the episode, makes occasional appearances at Seattle Grace Hospital. If this was not a “very special race” episode, then Shane would likely continue to be part of the GA universe. However, Bailey’s actions and decisions in this episode affect her personal life, which is differs from the special episode format. Gray states “With television’s conventional reliance on narrative resolution, once identified, such troubling issues as racial prejudice are easily resolved (or contained) in the space
of thirty minutes” (p. 86). Although Shane might be gone from the hospital, her decision to treat him and not give the case to another doctor ends up being a breaking point in her marriage.\(^504\)

Although not as explicit as a white supremacist refusing treatment from black doctors, there are two additional occurrences in season four in which race is brought into the foreground and disrupts the assimilationist world of Seattle Grace Hospital. Both instances involve Dr. Webber, the chief of surgery, and the hospital’s newest cardiothoracic surgeon, Dr. Erica Hahn (Brooke Smith), who is white.\(^505\) In the season four episode, “Kung Fu Fighting” (2007), it is Dr. Hahn’s first day as the head of cardiothoracic surgery.\(^506\) Dr. Hahn has a difficult time adjusting to her new job and interacting with her co-workers. When Webber introduces her to Drs. Shepherd and Sloan, both doctors refer to her as “the new Burke.” This is the last thing that Hahn wants to hear. During one of her previous visits to Seattle Grace, viewers learn that she and Burke were rivals during medical school at Johns Hopkins. Burke was first place in their class and she was second. Also in the series, Seattle Grace Hospital is known as one of the best teaching hospitals in the country and the best hospital in Seattle. Dr. Hahn had worked across town at Seattle Presbyterian.

During her first official procedure at Seattle Grace, Webber visits Hahn in the operating room. Hahn calls his presence an unexpected surprise and asks if he needs anything. Webber replies that he just wanted to see how she was settling in to her new job. After surgery, she discovers that Webber has a “gentlemen’s evening” planned for that night for the male attendings.

\(^{504}\) Even though Tucker is aware of the uniquenes of Shane’s case, Tucker views it his wife once again choosing her career over her family.

\(^{505}\) At the beginning of the fourth season, it is revealed that Dr. Burke left. However, Hahn’s arrival is not her first time visiting Seattle Grace Hospital. Hahn was part of the Denny Duquette storyline in the season two finale in which Izzie Stevens cuts Duquette’s LVAD wire in order to move him up on the heart transplant list. Burke is Duquette’s doctor but does not know what Stevens did to the LVAD wire. When he returns to the hospital, he is shot in the parking lot. Hahn performs the transplant operation in Burke’s place. Hahn also returns in season three to operate on George O’Malley’s father because Burke has not fully recovered from his gunshot wound.

\(^{506}\) Original airdate of episode: November 2, 2007.
The next scene with Hahn and Webber occurs when Hahn decides to perform a risky procedure: awake open heart surgery.\textsuperscript{507} Webber pages her to his office. When Hahn arrives he instructs her to shut the door. Webber is upset that she would not consult him on such a risky procedure.\textsuperscript{508} Hahn takes the offensive and asks if Burke and the other male attendings always run every surgery by him. Hahn then makes it about gender and lectures her new boss:

\begin{quote}
Hahn: I’m talking about your male attendings. You know the ones you invited to your gentlemen’s evening. Guess you don’t know a guy until you work for him. I mean who knew you were running some kind of old boy’s club.
Webber: That’s not it.
Hahn: You realize that an evening to which the male attendings are invited and the women are not, you realize that’s a lot like when law firms used to have country club weekends and fail to invite the black associates.
(Webber does not respond)
Hahn: Good talk. I got to prep for surgery.\textsuperscript{509}
\end{quote}

Webber is in four more scenes after his meeting with Hahn. First, he performs a surgery on a patient with internal bleeding with George O’Malley. Webber provides a pep talk to O’Malley, who had spent most of the day being hazed by Dr. Sloan. Through O’Malley, Webber realizes the error of his ways and sees that his gentlemen’s evening is similar to O’Malley’s hazing by Sloan. In this instance, O’Malley again represents the white, middle-class ideology that maintains the assimilationist order at Seattle Grace Hospital. Webber fixes the situation by giving her his approval during the awake open-heart surgery and inviting her to his gentlemen’s evening.

He then appears in the gallery observing the awake open-heart surgery. The patient, who is an ornithologist, describes Webber: “the tall one standing there, watching over everything, uh

\textsuperscript{507} In the episode, the patient is allergic to anesthesia, but has a severe blockage in one of his arteries. Hahn figures out that she can perform the procedure using an epidural, but this requires that the patient is awake during the surgery.

\textsuperscript{508} Webber’s exact words to Hahn: “You had the nerve to tell a patient you would perform awake open heart surgery without running it past me?”

\textsuperscript{509} Tom Verica, “Kung Fu Fighting,” in Grey’s Anatomy (United States: ABC, 2007).
over everyone, he doesn’t miss a thing, he’s a great blue heron.” At this comment, Hahn looks up to the gallery and notices Webber. Webber nods his head at Hahn. Webber’s final scenes occur during the “gentlemen’s evening.” Drs. Sloan and Shepherd had been puzzled all day about the events that would transpire. As soon as Webber shows up, they ask him what exactly a gentlemen’s evening is. Webber replies: “An evening with no ladies.” After he says this, Erica Hahn shows up; this confuses Sloan and Shepherd even more. Webber then tells them “plans change.” In the final shot, Hahn, Webber, Sloan, and Shepherd are playing Monopoly. Webber is the banker and upset that Hahn gets Park Place.

Hahn later uses Webber’s race during a second altercation with the chief of surgery. In the episode, “Losing My Mind” (2008), Webber’s mentor, Dr. Walter Tapley, who is white, comes to Seattle Grace Hospital. At first, Webber thinks Tapley is just coming to for a visit and to observe. Tapley is one of the leading cardiothoracic surgeons in the country. Webber asks Hahn if she has any special cases that Tapley could scrub in on during his visit. Also in this scene is George O’Malley, who is working as the chief’s intern/assistant. O’Malley informs Hahn that Webber studied under Tapley, which impresses her. Hahn promises to find an interesting case for Tapley, stating, “I will stab someone in the chest if I have to.” Webber also wants Hahn to meet Tapley when he arrives. During that meeting, Tapley informs Webber and Hahn that he is not there for a visit but rather needs heart surgery. Tapley’s previous medical conditions make the surgery very risky; his colleagues refused to perform the surgery because it might kill him. When Hahn asks why he thinks they will perform the surgery, Tapley replies

---

510 The patient does this because he is freaking out over the surgery sounds and people watching him from the gallery. Izzie Stevens gets him to relax by thinking about everyone in the observation gallery as birds. She then asks him to describe the doctors/birds to her.
512 Hahn states, “You studied at the right hand of God? Wow.”
(looking at Webber): “I didn’t start their careers. They can say no to me. Webber can’t.” Webber tries to convince Hahn to do the risky procedure because Tapley was his mentor:

Webber: Let me tell you a story. Thirty-eight years ago, when I was a young intern.
Hahn: I’m sorry is this gonna be a story about how you were a struggling black med student who wanted to be a surgeon and no one would give you a chance and Walter Tapley gave you that chance. He mentored you, and without him you wouldn’t be in this hospital today.
Webber: Yes.
Hahn: I’m still not gonna operate on him.513

When Webber tells Tapley about Hahn’s refusal, Tapley is upset and blames Webber: “if you can’t get the head of cardiothoracics to do a valve replacement then you are not the chief I thought you were and this is not the facility I thought it was.” This motivates Webber to demand that Hahn look at the file again. Hahn reluctantly agrees to do the surgery but threatens Webber. If Tapley dies during surgery, she is going to tell everyone that Webber made her do it. Once Hahn leaves the room, Tapley confesses to Webber that another doctor would have done the procedure, but he wanted to have a friend, and one of his oldest friends, there to say goodbye. Webber is honored. There are complications during the procedure, and Hahn yells at Webber for making her do it. Luckily, Tapley survives the surgery, but Hahn never apologizes about her outbursts at Webber.

It is worth noting that the first scenario between Hahn and Webber occurred before the white supremacist ambulance driver and the second occurred after the white supremacist incident.514 It is also interesting that Dr. Hahn would refer to race a second time after the incident with the white supremacist. Part of the GA universe is that the doctors enjoy talking about medical cases and news, especially bad news or problematic cases, travels fast. The incident with the white supremacist involved four EMTs, and more importantly, the crash happened right outside

---

513 Kung Fu Fighting.
514 The first scene occurred in episode 6. The white supremacist incident was part of a two-part episode (9 and 10) and the exchange over the risky surgery on Webber’s mentor occurred in episode 15.
the hospital in the ambulance bay. Hahn was even brought in to consult on Roy’s (one of the EMTs) case. If this was not enough, Bailey’s declaration in the operating room that she not be called “the Nazi” ever again means that Hahn was likely aware of the situation about Bailey’s difficult patient.

Dr. Hahn is the first character on the show to explicitly mention the color of Dr. Webber’s skin. Before season four, when other doctors challenged Dr. Webber, they never addressed his race at all. In the exchanges between Hahn and Webber, Webber is the “ist.” In the first example, he is sexist because he is having a gentleman’s evening. Hahn states that because he is a black man and knows what exclusion feels like, he should not be participating in such an event. In the second example, he is an irrationalist. If Webber thought about Dr. Tapley’s case like a rational surgeon, he would realize that the procedure is not a viable option. However, because Dr. Tapley started his career and gave him a chance when other white doctors would not, he cannot think clearly. Yet Dr. Hahn is also an “ist.” She is not racist but a post-racist. She has violated this code by mentioning Webber’s skin color not once but twice. The Hahn-Webber exchanges reinforce that GA is an assimilationist program.

However, the two examples with Hahn both in when it addresses race explicitly and when it does not also illustrate of how Herman Gray’s terms are in need of a Neo-Cosby Moment update. Although not a “very special race” episode, Hahn clearly disrupted the colorblind environment of Seattle Grace. Dr. Hahn’s exit a few episodes later confirms the show is assimilationist. Hahn upset the colorblind world of Seattle Grace not once but twice and therefore had to be removed.

515 Roy was one of the EMTs trapped in the ambulance. In the middle of the consultation, Hahn is paged to the OR because one of her patients had post-surgery complications.
A final example of how *GA* is an assimilationist program occurs during the season six episode, “The Time Warp” (2010). In this episode, Drs. Bailey and Webber share stories about their most trying medical cases and how these cases defined them as doctors. Bailey and Webber are not sharing these with each other. Rather, they are presenting them as part of lecture series at the hospital. By this episode in season six, Webber is not the chief of surgery anymore. Earlier in the season, it is revealed that Webber, an alcoholic, has relapsed. This episode marks his return to the hospital after going to rehab. Before the lecture starts, Webber is informed by Derek Shepherd, the new chief of surgery, that he will not be coming back to the hospital as chief of surgery but as an attending. After Webber declines the offer, Shepherd then asks him to participate in the lecture day series as a final farewell to the hospital. Meanwhile, Miranda Bailey is a scheduled presenter along with Callie Torres. Also by the show’s sixth season, Bailey is a divorced, single mother involved in her first post-divorce relationship. Bailey’s boyfriend, Ben Warren, is an anesthesiologist at the hospital.

The entire episode includes a series of flashbacks from Drs. Bailey, Torres, and Webber. The common thread in all three is Webber’s presence. Before this episode, viewers knew that

---

517 During his relapse, Webber makes a mistake during surgery. Realizing that he could have killed the patient, he stops performing surgeries but continues drinking. Eventually the hospital discovers this information and temporarily removes him as chief of surgery until he goes to rehab.
518 Torres is the only Hispanic/Latina character on *GA*. Sara Ramirez plays Dr. Torres on *GA*. The show has not identified Torres’s ethnicity. The character first arrived in season two as a love interest for Dr. George O’Malley. During her relationship with O’Malley, Torres was presented as the “hot” Latina stereotype. However, this image was replaced in season four when Torres has feelings for another doctor at Seattle Grace Hospital, Dr. Erica Hahn. Since season four, Torres’ bisexuality has overshadowed her ethnicity. The only time Torres’ ethnicity is apparent on the show is when her parents come to visit and she talks to them in Spanish. She only speaks in Spanish when she is upset at them or starts fighting with them. From 2007-2011, Torres’s father, Carlos (Hector Elizondo) has appeared in four episodes, and her mother, Lucia (Gina Gallego) has been in one episode. I would argue that Torres is similar to Yang in that she has assimilated into the white world of Seattle Grace Hospital. However, she is forced to deal with her ethnicity more than Yang because of her dad’s visits. Yang’s father passed away when she was a child. Her mother remarried, but the stepfather has not visited Yang. Yang’s mother has been in three episodes of *GA*.
519 Warren, played by African American actor Jason George, is part of the new staff that comes to Seattle Grace when the hospital merges with another local hospital, Mercy West to form Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital. The merger is a major storyline at the beginning of season six.
Webber did his residency at Seattle Grace along with Meredith Grey’s mother, Ellis Grey. Webber and Ellis had an affair, which resulted in Ellis leaving her husband and moving with Meredith across the country. Webber did not leave his wife, and he became an alcoholic. Webber’s flashback involves Ellis, their relationship, and when he first started drinking in 1982. Dr. Bailey’s flashback occurs in 2004, during her first year at Seattle Grace, when she was a shy, timid intern. Her medical case reveals to viewers how she came out of her shell and became the “Nazi.” Also during her flashbacks, viewers see how Dr. Webber became her mentor. Dr. Torres’ flashback contains a different Dr. Webber.

In Torres’ flashback, she wants to perform a risky procedure, but Webber, who is not her mentor, disapproves. Torres is an orthopedic surgeon and wants to repair a patient’s legs that have been damaged from polio. Torres promises the patient that he will be able to walk again. Webber is upset that Torres made such a promise when the surgeries needed are dangerous because the patient has weak lungs. This case occurs during her third year of residency. She is confident that she can perform the surgeries successfully. Webber disagrees:

Webber: You’re privileged.
Torres: Sir?
Webber: Your application. I remember it. I’m saying you grew up privileged. And that privilege made you arrogant. And arrogance in an unseasoned surgeon is a very dangerous thing. . . Arrogant, arrogant. Alright Dr. Torres, you’ll live and die on this. This is your career at Seattle Grace.

This is very different from the conversation Webber has with Bailey about her application. This exchange occurs during Bailey’s first solo surgery, an appendectomy, which Webber assigned to her. This surgery takes place during Bailey’s intern year:

---

520 Torres’ flashback occurs during her third year of her residency at Seattle Grace. Torres and Bailey’s flashbacks are narratively inconsistent with the GA time line. Bailey states her case occurred during her first year at the hospital in 2004. This would also be Torres’ first year too. For Bailey and Torres, their third year would be 2007, but by 2007 Bailey and Torres are fifth-year residents. Viewers are familiar with the show’s liberties with time. For example, seasons one (2005) and two (2005-06) occur over a period of a couple of months. By the end of season three, the interns have completed their first year.
Webber: I’m glad you decided to come to Seattle Grace. You were a strong applicant and people are excited to have you here.
(Bailey looks up at her resident who is glaring from the gallery. Webber notices)
Webber: Surgery’s a shark tank. Sharks have teeth. Make sure you’re a shark and not a minnow.
Bailey: Sir are you referring to my height?
Webber: No I’m not. God made you short. Who made you quiet?

Bailey’s flashback starts three days into her residency and mostly involves her being hazed by her resident, Dr. Baylow. Baylow tells Bailey that interns are the “bottom of the surgical food chain.” Viewers are familiar with this phrase because Bailey tells her interns (Meredith, Cristina, George, and Izzie) this in the series’ first episode. Dr. Baylow is also blonde and blue eyed but is not called the “Nazi.” Throughout Bailey’s flashback, she is bullied by Baylow while being supported by Webber. Eventually Bailey becomes a shark and stands up to Baylow. Unfortunately, this happens in front of the hospital staff and Webber. Bailey then meets with Webber in his office, with Baylow and her friends standing across the hallway. She is surprised when Webber does not yell at her. He tells her to pretend that she is being yelled at to satisfy Baylow. He then tells her “you’re going to make a hell of a surgeon.” In contrast, after Torres successfully completes the surgery and the patient is able to walk for the first time since he was a child, all Webber does is gives her a pat on the shoulder.

In the early 1980s flashback, Webber’s medical case involves a patient with a severe, as-yet-unknown medical condition, which would eventually be known as AIDS. Before the medical case is set up for viewers, viewers see Dr. Webber during rounds with other residents, who are mostly white men. These men discuss an event that occurred over the weekend; the white doctors had played golf with an attending at a local country club. Webber’s exclusion from the conversation informs viewers that he was not part of this outing. Webber is not the only doctor in the scene excluded from the group. Dr. Grey is also an outsider because she is a woman.
Webber then informs the present-day audience of the difficulties Ellis Grey had as a woman; the other doctors called her “sugar, nurse, or nothing at all.” Webber does not mention to the audience any difficulties he had or if he was called by any other names. Drs. Webber and Grey are the only doctors willing to treat the patient with AIDS. Webber also has an altercation with his attending, Dr. Gracie, over the patient’s treatment. Dr. Gracie informs Webber that 10 years ago he would not have been allowed in the residency program at Seattle Grace. At one point, Webber and Grey are put on probation because of their involvement in the case. Eventually the patient dies and Webber and Grey go to the local bar across the street. Grey chastises Webber for not drinking and insists that the bartender pour him a vodka tonic. Webber states that he does not like the taste of alcohol, but he drinks it for her. This is also the start of his alcoholism.

In “The Time Warp” episode, viewers see how far Dr. Webber has come at Seattle Grace. He went from being an outsider to the chief of surgery. What is interesting about Webber’s case is that he starts his story with the phrase “once upon a time.” This was not the first time Webber used such a phrase. In the season four episode “Losing My Mind” (2008), he says “let me tell you a story” when telling Erica Hahn about his mentor Walter Tapley. These examples reinforce that GA is an assimilationist program by making issues with race as a problem within the individual or by situating them in the past. Webber is shown as creating a post-racial colorblind world at Seattle Grace, in which his attendings and residents do not have worry about such things. The fact that the other two flashbacks are from doctors of color serves as evidence of the impact Webber has had on Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital.

---

521 He does mention that he and Ellis Grey “had more to prove” than the other doctors.
522 Webber and Grey are placed on probation because they ask the patient if he was intimate with men. The patient becomes offended and reports them to Dr. Gracie. A few months later the patient returns in worse condition and apologizes to Grey and Webber for lying.
Whether dealt with directly in the narrative or by virtue of its absence, viewers are led to believe that issues with race are in the past or isolated as individual problems. Yet, the flashbacks are deceiving, especially Dr. Bailey’s. Bailey’s flashback represents how she became the Nazi and how Dr. Webber took her under his wing. However, Bailey’s 2004 flashback inadvertently demonstrates that we have not progressed that much in twenty years. The show does not dwell on the lack of diversity within the hospital, only the progress. Dr. Bailey is the only African American intern or resident. Also throughout the series, viewers witness multiple scenes between Bailey and Webber in which Webber mentors her or provides support. Yet in six seasons, not once have they had a conversation about being black doctors at a hospital in which most of the doctors are white. Also it is not until the incident with the white supremacist that Bailey even considers the context surrounding her nickname the “Nazi.” The nickname disappears until season six, when it becomes acceptable to use it again when Bailey calls herself the “Nazi.”

In that episode, “Blink” (2010), Dr. Shepherd tries to set Bailey up with another doctor at the hospital (this is before her relationship with Ben Warren). Bailey warns the potential suitor, “People call me the ‘Nazi’ and it’s not because of my ice blue eyes.”

Amanda Putnam (2008) argues that over the course of the series Miranda Bailey regressed from a doctor that was very professional and the voice of reason to a guidance counselor. She argues that the absence of Bailey’s personal life and the shift to counselor role changed Bailey from a breakthrough African American character to a familiar stereotype: the mammy figure. Putnam is not the only scholar to see Bailey as a mammy figure. Kristen Warner (2010) and Felicia Henderson (2009) also acknowledge this imagery of Bailey. Putnam, Warner, and Henderson’s work examines Bailey’s image from season one through five. Bailey’s divorce and new

---

525 Zisk.
romance in season six, however adds new layers to the mammy imagery. The fact that Bailey is finally seen in a romantic relationship is major change for the character. However, her relationship mostly occurs off-screen. Unlike her white counterparts, her most intimate scenes with Warren are not shown. The absence of these scenes, along with her removal from the black community further reinforce that GA is an assimilationist program. However, the serialization adds a different layer to analysis beyond that posed by Gray.

Bailey and Webber are both removed from the African American community throughout the series. Although you see Bailey and Webber’s personal lives outside the hospital, these scenes are limited to their homes. Starting in season four, Dr. Bailey’s marriage begins falls apart. Yet all the viewers see is Bailey and her husband, Tucker, fighting at home or in the hospital. Dr. Bailey is not the first doctor with marital problems on the show, but the disintegration of her marriage is very different than Dr. Shepherd’s. For example, Dr. Shepherd and Dr. Montgomery-Shepherd are shown several times in season two attending marriage counseling sessions. Viewers also see them fighting, but there are tender moments between the couple as well. There are no tender moments between Bailey and Tucker. The lack of narrative emphasis on Bailey’s marriage reinforces that the white characters’ relationships are more important on GA. The same can be said for Dr. Webber. Starting in season two, he has marital problems with his wife, but viewers only see his wife (or family) at the hospital.526

The show has a diverse cast, but that diversity has its limits. For Drs. Bailey, Webber, and Burke, their blackness is limited mostly to the hospital. We see Dr. Burke’s personal space

---
526 The biggest complication in Webber’s marriage is that he works too much and puts the hospital before his wife Adele. The Webbers do not have any children. In season two, their niece is brought to the hospital because her cancer has returned. The niece shows up again in season three when she refuses further treatment. Webber respects her wishes, which upsets his wife Adele. She then informs Webber that she knew about his affair with Ellis and stayed with him anyway. Eventually Adele and Webber divorce (in season three) but get back together (in season four).
outside the hospital because of his relationship with Dr. Yang. Viewers do not know Dr. Bailey is married or see her husband until season two. Dr. Webber’s wife also does not make an appearance until season two either. The series does not show Bailey’s home life until season four. The show could have explored how Dr. Bailey came to Seattle Grace or looked more at her family. In the sixth season, her father comes to town for Christmas to visit his daughter, son-in-law, and grandson only to discover that Bailey’s marriage has ended and Tucker has taken their son to his parents’ house for the holidays. In the episode, her father is very upset that her marriage has ended. This fight occurs at Meredith Grey’s house during Christmas dinner. Dr. Webber is also there. Instead of showing Dr. Bailey’s personal connections outside the hospital, we see that she is part of the “white world” inside the hospital and outside of it.

Whiteness dominates on GA. One could argue that because it is a medical drama, the lack of storylines about Drs. Webber and Bailey’s lives outside the hospital is not a big deal. However, the show has left the walls of the hospital to show viewers Meredith’s house, Dr. Shepherd’s residence, and even Dr. Burke’s apartment. For being a medical multicultural ensemble drama, the African American characters do not receive nearly as much airtime or as many storylines as their white counterparts. Also, in seasons four (2007) and five (2008), Bailey and Webber are the only African American doctors. Even though the show added new characters in both seasons, they were all white. Moreover, these new characters had their own substantive storylines. For example, Meredith’s half-sister, Dr. Lexie Grey (Chyler Leigh) became an intern at Seattle Grace Hospital in season four. Her storylines involved getting to know and

---

527 Season four added three new characters: Dr. Lexie Grey (Chyler Leigh), Nurse Rose (no last name, Lauren Stamile), and Dr. Erica Hahn. In the early part of season five, Nurse Rose transfers to another department at the hospital and Dr. Hahn leaves. In season six, the series added recurring characters Dr. Sadie Harris (Melissa George), Dr. Owen Hunt (Kevin McKidd), and Dr. Arizona Robbins (Jessica Capshaw). Capshaw and McKidd became series regulars. African American actress Kimberly Elise had a recurring role at the end of season six as Izzie Stevens’s oncologist, Dr. Swinder. However, Dr. Swinder disappears once Stevens’s cancer is in remission.
work with Meredith, being Cristina Yang’s intern, and becoming friends with (and having a crush on) George O’Malley. In the next season, Lexie started dating Dr. Mark Sloan. Also in season four, Erica Hahn (Brooke Smith) became romantically involved with Callie Torres, and Nurse Rose dates Derek. In season four, Bailey’s major storyline involved the disintegration of her marriage; most of this storyline occurred off-screen. Webber started this season living in a trailer next to Derek’s trailer in the woods because he and his wife are separated. Although Webber was able to save his marriage, this event also transpired off-screen.

The continued absence of depictions of Webber and Bailey’s lives outside the hospital reinforces the emphasis on whiteness on Grey’s Anatomy. In the series, a popular location for the doctors is Joe’s, a bar across the street from the hospital. Drs. Bailey, Burke, and Webber go to Joe’s but never go there together. However, Meredith is a frequent patron of Joe’s along with Derek, Cristina, Alex, George, and Izzie. The problem with Bailey, Burke, and Webber never socializing outside the hospital is that it reinforces that they are supporting characters. Viewers never even see Webber and Bailey having lunch together at the hospital, even though he is her mentor. In six seasons, there have been multiple scenes of the white doctors eating lunch together in the cafeteria. The black doctors are rarely seen in this area of the hospital. The fact that the show does not dwell on this is telling and solidifies GA as an assimilationist program that reinforces whiteness.

The problem with GA being an assimilationist program is that the show promotes itself as a multiculturalist ensemble cast drama. There is a contradiction between the show and the show’s paratexts.528 The publicity surrounding Rhimes’s race and her use of colorblind casting

528 In Show Sold Separately, Jonathan Gray discusses how a show’s paratext (publicity, promotion, merchandising, etc.) are extensions of the media text and influence how viewers’ watch the text and make sense of it.
also provide the show with the façade of being a multiculturalist program.\textsuperscript{529} Also how the show uses race is very similar to how Rhimes talks about it in her image as a black public creative figure: both rarely discuss it at all. Yet, if the show were truly multicultural, then viewers would see more of the black characters’ personal lives. Yet the few aspects of their personal lives that we do see are connected to the white characters on the show. Webber’s personal history is explored because of its impact on the show’s leading character, Meredith Grey. Yet we could also see diversity among the black characters on the show. On \textit{GA}, there is no blackness. The black characters are assimilated into the white middle-class world of Seattle Grace Hospital. The fact that the show does not include any discussion about race does a disservice to its narrative and viewers. Donald Bogle claims that the lack of any racial discussion can be problematic:

\begin{quote}
Cultural distinctions still exist, even if we don't feel that there is blatant racism in the workplace the way there once was. We don't want to see a racial or cultural problem every week, but at some point if you ignore them it becomes dishonest.\textsuperscript{530}
\end{quote}

Even when the show uses race as a narrative device, it does not talk about the cultural, historical, or political context. The white supremacist storyline is more about Bailey’s failures than the impact of one-of-their-own (an ambulance driver) having this belief system. The show glosses over the fact that Shane is an EMT and his partner is an African American woman. Viewers never see Mary’s reaction to Shane’s revelation. The altercations between Drs. Webber and Hahn are more about Hahn using Webber’s race to make him feel bad or foolish. Webber never corrects her or tells her that his gentlemen’s evening (which is more about his separation from his wife than intentionally excluding Hahn) is nothing like country club weekends. In the flashback episode, \textit{GA} again attempts to situate racial tensions in the past, and the fact that Web-

\textsuperscript{529} Although \textit{GA} has more diversity than other broadcast network shows, representations of blackness on the show are consistent with what viewers find on a mainstream (white) broadcast network with nods to diversity but prioritizing white upper/middle class viewers.

\textsuperscript{530} Fogel.
ber shares more about the struggles Dr. Ellis Grey faced as a female surgeon than his own as a surgeon of color solidifies GA as an assimilationist program.

4.5 Blackness on House of Payne

HOP addresses blackness in a different way than GA. Whereas whiteness dominates on GA with HOP, viewers see blackness represented from multiple perspectives. On HOP, blackness is used for comedy and to address relevant issues within the African American community from different viewpoints (i.e., class or educational differences). Important topics such as class tensions, drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. are integrated into the HOP narrative. Furthermore, the show is more serialized than earlier black-oriented sitcoms in addressing these issues.531

Although the primary location on HOP is the Payne residence, the show has three additional locations: the fire house, the barber shop, and the help center. The help center and fire house have been part of the series since the beginning. The barber shop, In the Cut, was added in season three. The fire house and barber shop have recurring characters, but the help center does not. Curtis, C.J, and Calvin work at the firehouse with Bart, Keenan, and Angel. Bart is white, Keenan is African American, and Angel is Hispanic. The recurring characters at In the Cut are Floyd, the shop owner, barbers Kiki and Delante, and nail technician Dana. Floyd, Kiki, and Delante are African American. Dana is half African American and Korean, but her coworkers (and the Payne men) primarily focus on her Asian features. In season five, Delante is replaced by Zach, a white barber.532 Unlike GA, HOP acknowledges these differences, albeit mostly for humor. However, these differences, and how others handle them, have been storylines through-

---

531 This will be discussed in more detail, but HOP varies from past black-oriented sitcoms in that certain storylines such as Janine’s drug addiction are not resolved in a few episode but continue throughout the series.

532 On the show, Delante falls in love and moves out of state.
out the run of the show. Also, the African Americans in the Payne universe have varying skin
tones, which is addressed throughout the series.

Viewers see blackness represented from multiple perspectives, starting with the Payne’s
extended family. Janine, C.J’s wife, and Miranda, Calvin’s wife, are from upper-middle-class
families. Janine’s father, Larry Shelton, is a podiatrist and Miranda’s father, Jeffrey Lucas, is an
obstetrician. Also Miranda’s mother, Sandra, is a lawyer, and Janine’s mother, Liz, does not
work. Janine and Miranda show traces of their upper-middle-class lifestyles, but the primary
clashes in opinion occur when the in-laws come to town, especially Janine’s parents.

Although the repartee between the Sheltons and the Paynes provide comedic humor, it al-
so sheds light on a bigger issue of class tensions within the African American community. There
is a class tension between middle-class and working class African Americans, especially in cities
with large African American populations such as Atlanta, Chicago, and New York.\footnote{Michael Fletcher, "The Class War in Black America," \textit{Essence}, May 2007.} Harold
Lucas, president of the Black Metropolis Convention and Tourism Council in Chicago, states
that “Class stratification within the race is worse than White racism.”\footnote{Ibid.} Lucas observes that the
biggest problem occurs in run-down urban areas that have been cleaned up and rebuilt to appeal
to upscale African Americans. These social and economic differences can be seen in how the
Sheltons treat the Paynes.

The Sheltons appear in the first season after Janine has left the Payne household because
of her addiction to crack and refusal to get treatment.\footnote{C.J. takes Janine to a rehab facility. Curtis and Ella gave him money from their retirement fund to pay
for it. Within a few hours, Janine checks herself out of the facility and the center will not give C.J. a refund.} They cannot understand how this hap-
pened to their daughter and clash with the blue-collar Paynes, especially over C.J. and Janine’s
children. They call social services to investigate the Paynes and threaten to sue for custody of
the children. Liz clearly believes she is better than Ella and the rest of the Paynes. For example, Liz treats Ella more like a servant than an in-law. Every time she comes to visit, she instructs Ella to get her bags. She also insults Ella’s taste and cooking. During one of her visits, she rearranges the living room furniture and replaces all the food in the fridge with healthy organic alternatives. By the end of each episode, Liz does treat Ella and the Paynes better, but by her next visit, she returns to her old ways. Larry is more civil to the Paynes, but the viewers can tell he is not one of the Paynes. Liz and Larry dress and behave differently than the Paynes. While the Paynes wear more casual attire, the Sheltons are usually wearing suits when they come to visit.

The Paynes’ experience with the Sheltons makes them very cautious when they discover that Miranda comes from an upper-middle-class family. They are worried that Jeffery and Sandra Lucas will be as “uppity” as the Sheltons. The Lucas family dresses like the Sheltons, but they treat the Paynes with more respect. Sandra Lucas never insults Ella, and Jeffery even helps Curtis fix the oven. Jeffrey and Sandra Lucas provide a balance to the Sheltons in terms of class representation.

The topic of class stratification is not limited to visits from the Sheltons. In season two, Ella experiences this issue from members of her own church. In the episode, “Step It Up” (2008), Ella’s niece, Renee, comes to town to meet with Ella’s church about a college scholarship. Ella has not seen Renee since she moved to Los Angeles five years ago. The Renee that Ella remembers was a “prissy princess” but very smart. Renee always made honor roll and was the valedictorian of her class. Generally the sitcom cliché for smart people is the nerd archetype,

539 Original airdate: January 9, 2008.
but Renee is the opposite. The prissy princess has been replaced with a woman from Los Angeles that is up-to-date on the latest urban fashion and slang. For Ella, Renee’s words are jargon, and Ella’s son, Calvin, has to translate. For example, Renee’s first words to Ella are “Yo, Auntie El what it do?” To which Ella replies, “I don’t know, but whatever it is, it did it all over you.” (Renee’s phrase is slang for “how are you doing?”)

Renee does not look or speak like a class valedictorian, which creates issues with the scholarship committee. Emily, one of the scholarship committee members, believes Renee is not there for the meet-and-greet but for Bonquisha’s birthday party, which is down the hall. While the other scholarship finalists are in suits and dresses, Renee wears a mini skirt with tights. Also she uses informal speech with the scholarship committee:

Emily: Renee, your personal statement was most impressive. I heard you plan to pursue architectural engineering.
Renee: Oh for sure. Yo, I got some real crunked up designs like pounding my dome night and day.
Emily: Pardon me, Ella, what did she just say?
Ella: She said she is so happy to be considered for this scholarship.

When asked about her role models, Renee answers with Lil’ Kim, Queen Latifah, and Condoleezza Rice; Renee describes Rice as “straight gangsta.” Renee’s answer, attire, and gold tooth make Emily believe that Renee cheated on the scholarship application and had someone write it for her. Upset, Renee leaves the meet-and-greet. Back at the Payne house, Ella, Renee, and Janine discuss what happened. Ella tells Renee that people judged her by her appearance and behavior at the event. Renee states that the situation is unfair, to which Ella replies, “Lots of things in life are not right. But you don’t give up. If you do, they win.” Janine tells Renee that she needs to speak the committee’s language, which results in a makeover in appearance and behavior. During the interview, Renee wears a suit and tries not to use any slang. By the second

---

question Renee reverts back to her regular speech pattern, which does not impress Emily. Emily then tells Renee that she is not the right candidate for the scholarship and calls her a “hood rat,” which causes Ella and Janine to intervene. Ella chastises Emily for judging Renee because she does not look like the other applicants, and Janine states that what Emily is doing is wrong because “it’s hard enough to get into college without having your own people frowning down on you.” Another committee member stops Emily from talking and asks the committee to vote. The rest of the committee (and eventually Emily) award Renee the scholarship.

Using Herman Gray’s terms, “Step It Up” confirms that HOP is a multiculturalist program because it shows blackness from multiple perspectives. First is Emily’s perspective, which is defined as upper-middle-class. As part of the scholarship committee, she dresses in a suit and pearls. She also talks about Yale. Ella represents the working class perspective. She attended the meet-and-greet and scholarship interview in her normal attire. Renee is the lower-class perspective. When she arrives at the Payne house, she is surprised that there are no bars on the windows. Also, her dialect and attire differentiate her from Emily and Ella. In the episode, the only Payne family member to understand Renee is Calvin. In this aspect, he speaks two languages. His youth allows him to exist in both worlds. For example, in the HOP universe, Calvin’s two best friends are Pookie and Peanut, who look and act like Renee. The Paynes are not the Huxtable family (upper-middle-class) but they are also not the Evans family (lower class). They fall somewhere in-between. Their in-between status allows them to interact with African Americans above and below their status. Calvin can be friends with Pookie and Peanut (lower class) while also marrying Miranda (upper-middle-class).

Pookie and Peanut are recurring characters throughout the series. They have been friends with Calvin since childhood. Pookie and Peanut are known for their get-rich-quick schemes that never work.
Another important topic that is a prominent part of the HOP narrative is substance abuse. The show’s biggest storyline during the first two seasons involved Janine’s crack addiction. On HOP, this is a continuing storyline. It takes two seasons (60 episodes) for Janine to be clean and sober and back in the Payne household. Instead, viewers watch how one family member’s drug abuse impacts the entire family. For example, the kids at school tease Malik about his mother being a “crack head.”543 He starts acting out by getting a tattoo, shoplifting, and stealing Curtis’s motorcycle.544 Curtis even presses charges against Malik to teach him a lesson.545 A “say no to drugs” seminar at school upsets Jazmine and she lashes out at home, crying and yelling at the adults.546 She also cheats on a test and steals her classroom hamster.547 Janine steals from the Paynes to support her habit.548 C.J. struggles emotionally and financially.549 Even Curtis and Ella have marital issues.550 Janine’s recovery occurs off-screen, but this storyline demonstrates that HOP is a multiculturalist program.551 The upper-middle-class Sheltons disagree with the working class Paynes in how to handle Janine’s addiction. The viewers also see how Janine’s addiction impacts every member of the Paynes, from the kids to the adults. In addition to epi-

545 This is a three-part episode, which divides the Payne family. Perry, "Gone in Sixty Seconds."; Tyler Perry, "I Rest My Case," in House of Payne (United States: TBS, 2007); Tyler Perry, "Just Say No," in House of Payne (United States: TBS, 2007); Tyler Perry, "Lost without U," in House of Payne (United States: TBS, 2007).
546 Perry, "Just Say No."
548 Tyler Perry, "Cracking under Pressure," in House of Payne (United States: TBS, 2007). In the episode, Janine and her friends rob the house while no one is at home.
550 In one episode, Curtis has impotency issues. When Malik steals Curtis’s motorcycle and wrecks it, Curtis decides to press charges, and Malik is arrested. Ella throws Curtis out of the house. See Perry, "Gone in Sixty Seconds."; Tyler Perry, "I Keep Coming up Short," in House of Payne (United States: TBS, 2007); Perry, "I Rest My Case."; Perry, "Lost without U."
551 Viewers only see Janine during family day at rehab or when she receives a day pass from the rehab facility to visit the Paynes.
sodes in which viewers see the direct impact of Janine’s substance abuse on the Payne family, it is referenced in almost every episode.$^552$

Another topic of discussion in the *HOP* universe that establishes the show as a multiculturalist program is HIV/AIDS. Whereas *GA* treats HIV/AIDS as a disease that was scary but is now contained, *HOP* addresses it as a contemporary issue. HIV/AIDS is an issue of particular concern within the African American community. HIV affects African Americans more than any other group in the United States.$^553$ According to *Ebony* magazine, African Americans age 13-24 make up 60% of the HIV/AIDS cases in the United States.$^554$ In 2009, the CDC reported that for Black women ages 25-43, AIDS is the leading cause of death.$^555$

In the episode “I Got the Hookup” (2007), the help center hosts an HIV/AIDS workshop.$^556$ While Ella and Claretha are setting up the day before, a member of the church, Karen Bentley, stops by the center and volunteers to help with the workshop. After looking at the workshop materials, Karen informs the ladies that they need additional information about the symptoms and the importance of getting tested and offers to bring in her materials. When Claretha asks why she has this information, Karen tells them that she is a nurse and has HIV. Ella is okay with this self-disclosure but Claretha starts to act strangely around Karen, starting with slowly moving to the other side of the room. As Karen is leaving, she tries to shake Claretha’s hand. Freaked out over Karen’s HIV status, Claretha circumvents the hand shake with a fist bump in the air. Once Karen leaves, Ella asks why Claretha would not shake her hand. Claretha

$^552$ In every episode, there is at least one line about Janine’s crack addiction or reference to Janine. For example, once Janine is in rehab, Ella is the only Payne to visit her. In some episodes, Ella will mention a past visit or an upcoming visit.


responds, “I don’t know her like that. Plus, I like giving air dap. I’m cool like that.” During the workshop, Karen provides the attendees (and the viewers at home) with important statistical information about the disease and the importance of getting tested. By the end of the episode, Claretha learns the error of her ways and ends up apologizing and shaking Karen’s hand. Before the closing credits, actress Cassi Davis, who plays Ella, does a PSA about HIV/AIDS and how viewers can find out more information.

A second HIV storyline occurs in season five. In the episode “With Friends Like These” (2009), Malik befriends a student, Jeremy, who is the target of bullying because he has HIV. At first Malik does not know this information. While working on their algebra homework at the Payne house, Malik’s best friend, Kevin, comes over. Kevin warns Malik to stay away from him but does not say why. Jeremy overhears the conversation and leaves. In the next scene, viewers learn that Malik left the house to find Jeremy. Malik finds him being attacked by other kids from school. Viewers only see Malik and Jeremy return to the Payne house after the fight. Both have torn clothes and Malik has a black eye. Malik does not understand why Jeremy was beaten up. Once Jeremy tells Malik he has HIV, Malik starts asking questions about the difference between HIV and AIDS and how Jeremy contracted the disease. Jeremy informs him that he got it from unprotected sex with a girl. By the end of the conversation, Jeremy is happy to have a friend like Malik and tries to shake his hand. Malik does not shake his hand or say they are friends. Instead he admits that he is still decompressing from the earlier fight. Jeremy leaves.

Unlike the episode with Claretha, Malik is aware that one cannot contract HIV/AIDS by shaking someone’s hand or touching them. He also does not avoid touching Jeremy because he has HIV. Once Jeremy leaves, Malik and his mother Janine have a talk about the disease and

how lonely Jeremy must feel. By the end of the episode, Malik defends Jeremy to Kevin and Kevin apologizes for his behavior earlier that day. This episode also ends with a PSA about HIV and AIDS with the actors who play Malik (Doc Shaw) and Kevin (J.T. Knight).

The storyline and the PSA at the end of each episode demonstrate a multiculturalist approach. During her PSA, Cassi Davis, the actress who plays Ella Payne, states that African American children make up 71% of pediatric AIDS cases in the United States. In Doc Shaw’s PSA he states that there are two million people under the age of fifteen living with HIV from having unprotected sex. By having multiple storylines on HOP about HIV/AIDS, Perry demonstrates his awareness of how this issue specifically impacts audiences of color.

In addition to discussing drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, the show also explicitly deals with racial tensions. In 2008, New Media America, an association of over 700 ethnic media outlets, conducted a poll of three largest minority groups in the United States: African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. Their research found that these groups are mistrustful of each other and believe the racial and ethnic stereotypes associated with each group. In addition, seventy percent of the respondents cited “racial tension” as a major problem in the United States.

During the show’s fifth season, Claretha sells her house and leaves Atlanta with her new husband. The Paynes meet their new neighbors, the Hernandez family. In the episode, “Payne and Prejudice” (2008), the Hernandez family invites the Paynes over for dinner with disastrous results. Both families try to accommodate each other by cooking cultural foods and wearing clothes that they think the other family will enjoy. For example, Curtis wears a sombrero and

---

559 In the PSA, Davis provides the number to the National AIDS hotline.
560 These are not the only two episodes about HIV/AIDS on HOP. In a later episode, Calvin and Karen start dating. The relationship does not last long not because of her HIV but because Calvin dates a lot of women. Also someone from Janine’s addict days has AIDS and asks for her help in his final days. HIV/AIDS is referenced in storylines about Malik and his friends dating or having unprotected sex.
562 Ibid.
563 Original airdate: December 17, 2008.
serape to dinner and insists that Ella make enchiladas. Curtis’ rationale behind the food is that when one goes to an Italian restaurant, he or she eats Italian food; therefore since they are going to a Mexican house, they need to bring Mexican food to eat. When the Paynes arrive, Carlos, the Hernandez family patriarch, is wearing a dashiki and Rosie, his wife, has made fried chicken, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, and watermelon for dinner. Carlos greets the Paynes with “What up my people?” and also places a picture of Malcolm X on the coffee table. Both families are upset that the other would be so disrespectful and insensitive:

Curtis: Excuse me. Why would you assume we like watermelon?
Consuela (Rosie’s mother): You do don’t you?
Curtis: Hell yeah, we do, but that’s beside the point.  

To keep the peace, both families decide to go out for Chinese food. The result is that both families become more culturally sensitive, which is achieved through a frank discussion of the other culture’s stereotypes. For example, the Hernandez family asks the Paynes why all African Americans are late to everything, and the Paynes ask if all Mexicans are illegal. The families reach a common ground when they realize they go through the same experience shopping at a department store (i.e., having the clerks follow them around to make sure they are not shoplifting).

The secondary storyline in this episode involves characters from the barbershop. Dana, the nail technician, discovers her parents have come to Atlanta for a visit. Dana is upset because her parents think that she is still a pre-med student in college. Dana never enrolled and has been living off her parents’ money. Floyd and Kiki learn that Dana’s dad is a surgeon in Boston. Also in this episode, Dana identifies her ethnicity. Throughout the series, her co-workers and the Payne men have made jokes about her Asian heritage with references to kung fu or geishas. Dana finally tells Floyd and Kiki that she is not Chinese or Japanese but she is Korean. Her parents

---

arrive at the shop, and it is revealed that her mother is African American and her father is Kor-

ean. Her parents are upset that Dana has been lying to them and issue an ultimatum. She must
return with them to Boston or lose her monthly stipend. Floyd and Kiki try to encourage Dana to
stand up to her parents. They suggest that she get a second job and offer suggestions: taking pic-
tures, working in an electronics store, being a math tutor, selling DVDs, CDs, wigs, or weaves,
or becoming a dry cleaner. Dana responds “contrary to popular belief all Asians don’t do those
things.” Dana stands up to her parents and refuses to go back to Boston. Her father leaves the
barber shop. Her mother stays behind to tell her daughter that she is proud of her for finally
standing up for herself. She also tells Dana that she will continue to send her money.

This episode again fulfills Gray’s category of a multiculturalist show. The Payne and the
Hernandez families learn more about each other’s culture. Again, Perry addresses a statistically
significant phenomenon within communities of color. This is an important episode because of
the mistrust between Hispanics and African Americans. The New Media America study found
that “Sixty-one percent of Hispanics, 54 percent of Asians and 46 percent of African-Americans
would rather do business with Whites than members of the other two groups.”565 The Dana
storyline examines racial tensions between Asians and African Americans. Floyd cannot believe
that Dana’s mother, an African American woman, would be with an Asian man. Dana’s father
does not want his daughter working for Floyd and calls In the Cut a dump. The tensions between
the Paynes and Hernandezes are resolved once they discover that they have more in common

than they thought. The tensions between Dana’s parents and the In the Cut staff are resolved when they return to Boston and Dana stays at the shop.\footnote{Whites also have a place on \textit{HOP}. In addition to Bart, a fireman who works with Curtis, there are recurring white characters such as Curtis’s mentor Bill and Walter, a life coach. Ella also works with white members from her church at the help center, and Malik and Jasmine have white friends.}

The Hernandez family became part of the Payne universe in season five. Members of the Hernandez family have important storylines in seasons five and six. Malik likes the youngest Hernandez daughter, Alexandra, which results in more interactions between both families. In one episode, Calvin and the eldest Hernandez daughter, Mercedes, have to chaperone Malik and Alexandra’s date. Calvin also hangs out with Diego Hernandez, and Rosie and Ella start working together at a clothing boutique. The Hernandez family are recurring characters like the crew at the fire house and In the Cut.

In season six, \textit{HOP} again explores racial tensions in the episode “Parental Payne” (2009).\footnote{Original airdate: November 18, 2009.} Malik has the starring role in \textit{Othello} at school and has offered the Payne house as a location for the entire cast to practice. Before practice starts, the audience sees one of the cast members, Sarah Williams, being dropped off at the house by her father, Harold Williams. The Williamses are white. Harold shakes Curtis’s hand and they exchange pleasantries. Harold leaves Sarah to take his son to t-ball practice. Curtis escorts Sarah to the backyard where the other kids are. With Sarah’s arrival, all of the cast members are present except one; the kids ask Curtis to act as a stand-in. Harold returns near the end of the rehearsal just in time for a scene in which Othello (Malik) kisses Desdemona (Sarah). Harold becomes upset and states that he did not know there would be kissing in this play. He then tells Sarah it is time to go home. Sarah, confused, tells her father that she did not mind when she kissed another boy in a play last year. Harold replies, “That was a different situation, Harrison wasn’t . . . I mean he . . .” Sarah finishes
the sentence: “wasn’t black.” Malik then wants to know what Harold was going to say. He tells Malik that the situation is complicated and he is not comfortable talking about it. Sarah, embarrassed, asks her father to apologize to Malik. He refuses and makes Sarah leave with him.

After the rehearsal, Curtis checks on Malik, who is still clearly upset over what happened. He cannot understand how Harold could be uncomfortable with him and look at him like he was dirty. Malik tells his uncle that he does not understand. Curtis then shares a story about when he was 15 and a waitess broke a plate and threw it in the trash because he ate off it:

Malik: See? Nothing’s changed since the Civil War
Curtis: Well now you can’t say. Well you can’t say that. Things have changed. Okay? Sarah was ashamed of her father. That’s change. And she’s gonna grow up and she’s not gonna think like he thinks. That’s change. You can’t let the Mr. Williamses of the world get you down. You may never come back up.

This episode once more fulfills Herman Gray’s category of a multiculturalist program. It also follows a neo-racial discourse. Racial issues and tensions exist but things are better than they once were. Curtis’s story and Sarah’s embarrassment are proof. Also Mr. Williams remains a bigot. No one in the episode convinces him to see the error of his ways. What is also interesting is the choice of the play *Othello* and the historical and cultural context surrounding the race of the leading character.568

*HOP* is very different from *GA* because the show explicitly addresses racial differences throughout the series. Not only do the characters acknowledge that they are black but also that there are differences between other cultures as well as within the African American community. As a result, *HOP* is a multiculturalist program. While the show follows a traditional sitcom formula of humor and slapstick, Allen Payne, star of the show, frames it in this fashion: “It's come-

---

The show addresses relevant issues within the black community and in American society such as HIV/AIDS and substance abuse. There are also storylines that address class differences, teenage woes (dating, sex, bullies, etc.), and marital troubles (infidelity, impotency, etc.). Perry claims: “There's nothing off-limits. This is not one of those sitcoms where everything is taboo and slapstick. We get into some serious stuff.” Moreover, the show examines issues from multiple positions. For example, the HIV/AIDS storylines examine the issue from two generational perspectives: adults and teenagers. There are also multiple storylines about how the children and adults are struggling with Janine’s drug addiction. Yet HOP is also very similar to its black-oriented sitcom predecessors such as The Bernie Mac Show and Everybody Hates Chris with more lighthearted episodes like when Ella and Curtis go on a diet, the entire family participates in a media deprivation exercise, or the kids want a dog.

Yet as the quotations at the beginning of this chapter indicate, HOP is not seen as a multiculturalist program by media critics. Some critics find Janine’s crack addiction unbelievable. For New York Times writer Gina Bellafante, it is implausible: “House of Payne” asks us to believe that a good-tempered, attractive young mother of two, the wife of another industrious firefighter (Curtis’s nephew C. J.), would turn into a crack addict. This is due to the media perceptions of crack users; Jeanette Covington (2010) argues that in the media the drug is mostly associated with poor African Americans. According to Variety, "House of Payne rolls through

---

570 Ibid.
571 Ibid.
573 Bellafante.
574 For more information see Jeanette Covington, Crime and Racial Constructions: Cultural Misinformation About African Americans in Media and Academia (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).
a collection of stereotypes and characters familiar to TV auds.” The Paynes, especially Curtis and Ella, embody familiar stereotypes. Curtis acts buffoonish and Ella personifies the mammy figure.

However, the criticisms of *HOP* go beyond its stereotypical representations of African Americans. One reason is that *HOP* has low cultural status because it is a sitcom *and* it is produced by Tyler Perry. As a sitcom, the show’s formulaic structure limits its politics. More importantly, Perry as the public creative figure for *HOP* is another explanation for the show’s low cultural status. Perry has been dealing with negative criticism for his representations since his days on the urban theater circuit. His films have received the same criticisms about stereotypical representations of African Americans. These paratexts played a role in *HOP*’s treatment. Many critics easily dismissed the show for its stereotypes. While *HOP* contains stereotypical characters, there is more complexity to their representations, which is seen throughout the series. Like *Flavor of Love*, *HOP* “animates racial stereotypes [and] it also allows for fluid and complex understanding of black identity through active claiming of identities.” The show explores topical issues within the African American community and examines them from different perspectives. While race is not prevalent in every episode of *HOP*, it is presented more convincingly than on *GA*. On *GA*, white culture dominates; the characters of color must assimilate into the white middle-class world of Seattle Grace Hospital. *HOP* provides a space for both blackness and whiteness (as well as other ethnicities and races). The *HOP* universe is not assimilationist but all-inclusive, allowing for multiple outlooks. The fact that the characters on *HOP* acknowledge racial differences is more than *GA* ever does. Yet, *GA* is praised and *HOP* is chastised. *HOP* will never have the high cultural status in television that *GA* has because of its status as a lower-

575 Gallo.
quality program. Television dramas are viewed as having a higher quality of representations than other programming forms such as the sitcom or the reality show.

4.6 Blackness on America’s Next Top Model

ANTM provides the biggest challenge to Herman Gray’s categories because the reality show fits into more than one category. In Watching Race, he notes that television shows can sometimes be located in two categories: pluralist and multiculturalist. He states that programs that are located in both have “African American culture . . . central to the construction of black subjects as well as program content, aesthetic organization, setting, and narrative.” However, he does not cite any shows that are both assimilationist and multiculturalist that shift between these two registers during the course of their run. This is because assimilationist programs have a mostly white cast with characters of color in supporting or recurring roles while multiculturalist programs have a predominantly African American cast and showcase diversity from multiple perspectives. I argue that ANTM is an assimilationist and multiculturalist program. Yet can it be both?

One reason is that the programming form is very different from the programming forms available to Gray during the time of his original study. Fictional programming such as sitcoms or dramas was the primary programming form in the early years of the multi-channel transition in terms of representations of blackness, which is why HOP and GA more easily fit into Herman Gray’s categories of assimilationist and multiculturalist shows. Reality television did not become a popular programming form on the broadcast networks until 2000 with Survivor (CBS).

Nabi, Biely, Morgan, and Stitt (2003) define reality-based television programming as:

Programs that film real people as they live out events (contrived or otherwise) in their lives, as these events occur. Such programming is characterized by several elements: (a)

---

577 Gray, Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness 91.
people portraying themselves (i.e., not actors or public figures performing roles), (b) filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set, (c) without a script, (d) with events placed in a narrative context, (e) for the primary purpose of viewer entertainment.578

As discussed in Chapter One, reality shows borrow elements from other programming forms such as dramas and soap operas to construct a narrative. Also, reality shows are “highly crafted texts” that employ editing techniques to create “recognizable character types, plot lines, and other elements.” 579 An additional complication with ANTM is the number of “characters.” With each cycle comes a new set of 12-14 finalists that are eliminated each week. Although the cycle winner returns in the next cycle, it is a limited role. The previous cycle winner generally provides words of encouragement to the models during the first Cover Girl commercial, which occurs in the middle of the cycle, and to the two finalists in the cycle-finale episode. The primary focus of the series is the models. As a reality-competition show, the objective of ANTM is to crown “America’s Next Top Model.” Yet reality shows are important to examine because in the contemporary television landscape they tend to have more diversity in terms of race and gender than other programming forms (Hasinoff 2008).

Hasinoff (2008) examined ANTM because the show explicitly discusses race. She claims that the show uses race as a commodity. The models of color can use their “otherness” to stand out and make themselves unique but they must also adhere to mainstream standards within the industry to be successful. Hasinoff (2008) examined cycle 6, in which Danielle, an African


579 The narrative on ANTM is 12-14 model-contestants working hard at photo shoots and during challenges to prove to the judges that she has what it takes to win the title. For the contestants, their template is Tyra Banks. Banks and other judges, guests, etc. remind the models that Banks did not become a supermodel overnight. Yet with 13-14 finalists each cycle, the fact that every finalist wants to win creates drama and tensions within the model-house, which create additional narratives on the show. Mary Thompson, "“Learn Something from This!” the Problem of Optional Ethnicity on America's Next Top Model" Feminist Media Studies 10, no. 3 (2010).
American model from Arkansas, is critiqued by the judges for her Southern accent. Danielle also has a large gap between her front teeth. During makeover day, Danielle receives news that she is going to the dentist to fix the gap. At first she resists, but then allows the dentist to narrow the space between her front teeth. Danielle goes on to win the title of “America’s Next Top Model” for cycle six.

Mary Thompson (2010) continues Hasinoff’s work by examining the first ten cycles of ANTM to see how the show addresses race and ethnicity. She found that ANTM encourages an ideology of “optional ethnicity.” Thompson supports Hasinoff’s claims that ANTM depoliticizes race and ethnicity:

The absence of political awareness extends to the show’s representation of a flat multicultural playing field (presumed to be free of racism) for the expression of ethnic identities, where individuals are presumed to be equal and able to choose when and how to express ethnic heritage and pride. On the surface, detached from politics, neither gender nor race is seen to be a meaningful feature of identity beyond a playful stylistic choice; however at a deeper level, this masquerade works to obscure and reinforce the privilege of unmarked categories of maleness and whiteness.\(^{580}\)

According to Thompson, models of color walk a fine line on ANTM. First, they must own their heritage or they are punished by being eliminated. Second, they cannot own or embrace their heritage too much. The models are encouraged to use their race/ethnicity as a commodity but they cannot be “too ethnic.” Non-white models must be “non-threatening apolitical stereotypes.” In this section, I continue Hasinoff and Thompson’s work by extending the ANTM analysis to include cycles 11-15 while exploring how the show is an assimilationist and multiculturalist program when it comes to representations of blackness.

In cycles 11-15, there are two models that stand out in demonstrating how ANTM oscillates between assimilationist and multiculturalist. Kacey was a semi-finalist in cycle 11 (2008) but did not make it to the finals, and Angelea was a semi-finalist in cycle 12 (2009). Angelea

\(^{580}\) Ibid., 338-339.
reappears in cycle 14 (2010) and makes it into the model house; Kacey returns in cycle 15 (2010) and also becomes a finalist. Both are African American and are interesting case studies because they represent two very different types of racial narratives on the show. Kacey represents a model of color that does not embrace her blackness enough and Angelea represents a model of color that overemphasizes her blackness.

During the casting panels in cycle 11, Kacey tells Tyra, Ms. J, and Mr. Jay that her friends and family called her “white girl” as a kid because she had a lot of white friends.581 Kacey is from Palmdale, California, which is a suburb of Los Angeles. The African American population of Palmdale is 14%, but Kacey does not mention this in her explanation of why she had a lot of white friends as a child.582 Kacey also tells the casting panel that she used to have a lot of white friends. Ms. J. picks up on this and asks her to clarify. Kacey says her friendship with her white friends ended because they could not understand why she could not go swimming with them. She cites two reasons: she cannot swim and her hair. Tyra then chastises Kacey: “I don’t think you should choose friends just because of them not understanding your hair. I have so many white friends that have no idea what’s up with my hair. And it doesn’t make me go I can’t be your friend.”583 Kacey makes it through the first cut from 33 models to 20 but she does not make the final 14.

Kacey’s disconnect is also seen before she appears in front of the casting panel. Her first shot in the episode is talking to the camera about herself: “I’m a model. I know I am. I know how to have class and be sophisticated. I don’t see myself as ghetto. When I say ghetto my percep-

583 The topic of hair on ANTM will be discussed later in more detail.
tion of ghetto is like Leshequita, Lakanita or something like that you know.\footnote{There are no model-contestants on ANTM with those names. Kacey made up those names.} Kacey’s condescension toward “ghetto” women as well as her weak explanation of why she had a lot of white friends to the casting panel resulted in Kacey not being a finalist on cycle 11.

Kacey returns as a semifinalist in cycle 15 (2010). In her introduction during the first episode, she states that she did not make a good impression last time.\footnote{Bob Schermerhorn, "Welcome to High Fashion," in America’s Next Top Model (The CW, 2010). Original airdate: September 8, 2010.} This is reinforced when she is in front of the casting panel. Ms. J jokingly says that he received a text from Kacey’s boyfriend stating that he was with Isis (a cycle 11 contestant).\footnote{J. Alexander’s nickname on the show is Ms. J, but he is not transgender. He received the nickname from a contestant in cycle one because of his effeminate personality and flamboyant clothing on the show. His job on ANTM is to teach the model-contestants to walk the runway. He demonstrates runway walks for the contestants wearing women’s high heel pumps. Alexander also dresses in women’s costumes on the show and wears elaborate attire when he is part of the judging panel.} Isis was the first transgender model-contestant on ANTM. During the semifinals, Kacey shared her feelings about Isis in the confessional, “My mind was like what? Girl how’d you? Ain’t this supposed to be a girl competition? How did you get through the door?”\footnote{Croll.} This time Kacey does not tell the judges about her nickname “white girl,” which she did during the cycle 11 semifinals. Kacey redeems herself from her nickname in this cycle. For the semifinals, the models take a bus from Los Angeles to Palm Springs. Viewers see Kacey rapping on the bus. She is also seen sitting next to and talking with the other African American semifinalists. Mr. Jay also tells Tyra that he has been impressed with Kacey during the semifinals. In contrast, during the cycle 11 semifinals, all Mr. Jay said about her was that she looked like a Barbie doll. Kacey does make it as a finalist but she does not win the competition. She is eliminated in the sixth episode of the show.

Kacey was eliminated because she was seen as too commercial. During the semifinals, the models are grouped together according to type; Kacey is placed in the “sexy” category. In
cycle 15, the show shifted focus from models with mass appeal to high fashion models. Banks states in the first episode of the cycle that *ANTM* was designed to bring modeling to the masses. After 14 cycles, she believes the show is now ready for high fashion. The cover and spread in *Seventeen* magazine is replaced with a cover and spread in *Vogue Italia*. Also, every week, the photo shoots are done by top photographers in the world of high fashion such as Matthew Rolston and Patrick Demarchelier. The show also brings in top fashion designers Diane von Furstenburg, Zac Posen, and Roberto Cavalli as guest judges. Yet *ANTM* also kept its mainstream appeal with its continued relationship with Cover Girl cosmetics. Kacey won the Cover Girl challenge but could not deliver in photos. Banks and the judging panel thought Kacey had an “effervescent” personality, which was great for Cover Girl, but she did not bring that sparkle to her photographs, especially in the eyes. During her elimination, Banks tells Kacey that she is a beautiful girl with strong bone structure but she is not ready for international modeling and the world of high fashion.

Angelea first appeared as a semifinalist in cycle 12 (2009). Angelea looks very different from the other African American contestants. She wears big hoop earrings, a clip-in hair extension, and very long artificial nails. She states “I’m from the hood. I come from the ghetto.” Angelea’s lower-class status is revealed during the casting panel, when she tells Tyra, Mr. Jay, and Ms. J. that she slept in the NYC Port Authority Bus Terminal for two days during the *ANTM* call backs because she only had $40. Tyra says that she respects Angelea’s dream to be a model but warns her to not put it ahead of her own safety. Tyra also makes Angelea take off the earrings and the clip-in. Angelea makes it to the second round of the semifinals. During the photo

---

shout, Angelea gets into a fight with Sandra, another black model.\textsuperscript{589} The fight becomes so loud and intense that Mr. Jay intervenes. Angelea is worried about the consequences of the fight because “I don’t want people to think that you know I’m just this ghetto-ass, ghettofied, you know, no-class bitch who doesn’t care.” When the casting panel is going through the photos, Mr. Jay tells Tyra that Angelea was involved in a fight on set. What he does not do is tell Tyra about the other model, Sandra, involved in the fight. Sandra makes it into the model house, and Angelea is sent back to Buffalo.\textsuperscript{590}

Angelea returns as a cycle 14 (2010) semifinalist. She states that she is excited to be back and grateful to Tyra for bringing her back.\textsuperscript{591} For this cycle, Angelea ditched the large earrings and artificial nails and does not get into any altercations with the other semifinalists. During the casting panel, she explains that her anger from the last cycle was due to being in a complicated relationship with an ex-boyfriend. She states that as soon as she returned home, she started counseling. Mr. Jay says that he can already see a tremendous change in Angelea. Angelea also informs the panel that she has been preparing for \textit{ANTM} by researching the latest fashion trends and models. She cites model Iris Strubegger as an example because she booked the Valentino and Givenchy campaigns. Angelea mispronounces Givenchy, which Tyra corrects.

Cycle 14 Angelea is a modified version of the cycle 12 Angelea. In the next shot, which is in the model confessional, Angelea states that she is still from Buffalo and ghetto but she is “classy ghetto.” In a later confessional shot, she states “I’m still Angelea and I think that I am just that

\textsuperscript{589} Although Sandra does not identify herself as middle or upper-class, she does tell Angelea that she has more class than she does.
\textsuperscript{590} I will discuss in more detail in the next section Sandra’s importance in the competition.
bitch.” In the semifinalist episode for both cycles, Angelea talks about being from Buffalo, specifically East Buffalo, which she describes as “the hood.”

Angelea makes it into the model house and performs well in the competition. During the first week, she has the second best photo in the group. By the show’s sixth photo shoot, Angelea has the top photo of the week. Angelea is one of the final six models that travels to the international destination. For this cycle, the models travel around New Zealand. During the international destination episodes, all of the models participate in go-sees, in which the models travel to different fashion houses and participate in the modeling version of a job interview. At each go-see, the models show the designers their portfolios, try on the designers’ clothing, and model the clothes as if they are on the runway. The models’ primary objective with the go-sees is to be hired by the designer for print and runway campaigns. The models are not really hired by these designers. This is part of an ANTM challenge in which the model that books the most wins a prize, usually clothing from the designers participating in the challenge. Angelea wins the challenge because all six designers said that they would hire her to model their clothing.

Angelea makes it to the final four, because she embraces her “optional ethnicity.” She can perform as a model but also utilizes her “ghetto” personality to make herself stand out from the other models. For example, judge Andre Leon Talley praised Angelea for this: “Angelea, I love the photograph. There’s something so ethnic in this photograph that is beyond your ethnicity.” Yet by the final four, she cannot do it anymore. Angelea struggles in her last photo shoot. The theme of the shoot was “ugly-pretty” in which the models needed to showcase more

593 Term from Thompson.
than their beauty. In the *ANTM* universe, ugly-pretty means that the models must have intense/ugly faces in their photos. The objective is for their modeling potential to shine through the ugliness. Models that embody “ugly-pretty” in their photos demonstrate that they are high-fashion and not just commercial models. Angelea cannot master this concept and does not do well during the photo shoot. While standing in front of the judges, she looks defeated. The judges notice and ask what happened to her confidence. Angelea’s lack of an ugly-pretty photo and deflated personality in front of the judges resulted in her elimination. If she had been able to utilize her “optional ethnicity” and brought back some of her cycle 12 personality, she could have made it to the final two. In fact, Mr. Jay tells her during the shoot that she needs to show some anger and intensity. Yet her anger is what got her dismissed in the semifinals of cycle 12.

Cycle 14 Angelea cannot do this because she is reformed. Although she had a few disagreements with some of the other cycle 14 models, these scenes cannot compare to her fight with Sandra during the cycle 12 semifinals. Also she was critiqued for not displaying her personality at judging. The judges wanted to know what happened to the confident, smiling Angelea.

Angelea and Kacey reinforce Thompson and Hasinoff’s argument that *ANTM* commodifies race. Both models fail to make it on the show for very different reasons: Kacey is not black enough and Angelea is too black. Each has a redemption moment and is allowed back into the *ANTM* universe by showcasing how they have changed. Yet both changed *too* much and were not able to embody their optional ethnicity enough to win the title of “America’s Next Top Model.” Class also plays a role in Kacey and Angelea’s narrative on *ANTM*. Kacey was too privileged and Angelea was too poor to win *ANTM*. Part of the *ANTM* narrative is that the model-contestants are working to win the title to make a better life for themselves. Kacey never displayed this need during her time on *ANTM* whereas Angelea needed it too much. “America’s
Next Top Model” can grow up lower-class but cannot be poor enough at the time of the competition that she could not afford a motel and had to sleep in a bus terminal for two days. Angelea also showed her lower-class status when judge Andre Leon Talley visited the models in their New Zealand apartment. Angelea offers Talley some Alize, a cognac that has been coded in popular culture as a popular alcoholic beverage with rap artists.\textsuperscript{595} Talley’s visit also occurs during Angelea’s last episode. Kacey had the opposite problem on \textit{ANTM} in that she did not display her blackness enough. This is interesting because in the first episode of the cycle, which is the casting sessions, Kacey is with other models of color. In every cycle, the model-contestants bond with at least one other model in the house, but Kacey does not. Also during her last judging panel, Andre Leon Talley said that Kacey looked “snotty and detached” in her photo; during deliberation he also described her as an “exiled princess.”\textsuperscript{596} Kacey’s disconnect with her “optional ethnicity” resulted in her departure on the show after six episodes. Kacey and Angelea support Thompson’s assessment that models on \textit{ANTM} must utilize “optional ethnicity” to increase their longevity on the show. Angelea is able to straddle the line longer than Kacey, but ultimately cannot keep it up and is eliminated.\textsuperscript{597}

The commodification of race on \textit{ANTM} also demonstrates that the show is an assimilationist program. As models, the contestants must conform to industry standards. The models use their race to make them unique but they must still ultimately fit into the mainstream/white standards of beauty. All models of color on the show must adhere to mainstream standards in terms of beauty and behavior. For example, Banks uses her blackness as an example to a model-

\textsuperscript{595} Lynette Holloway, “Media; Hip-Hop Sales Pop: Pass the Courvoisier and Count the Cash,” \textit{New York\textcopyright\textsuperscript{T}}imes\textsuperscript{\textcopyright\textsuperscript{T}} (2002) (accessed September 11, 2012).
\textsuperscript{596} Tony Croll, "Patrick Demarchelier " in America’s Next Top Model (The CW, 2010).
\textsuperscript{597} What’s interesting about Angelea’s cycle is that another African American contestant, Krista, won the title. She and Angelea were also close during the cycle. Krista successfully straddled the line to win. However, Krista has faded into \textit{ANTM} obscurity whereas Angelea was a fan-favorite and popular enough that she was brought back for the first \textit{ANTM} all-stars cycle in 2011. Very few of the African American \textit{ANTM} winners have had big careers after the show, but this is the case for most of the \textit{ANTM} winners.
contestant who is very proud of her sexuality. She warns the model not to be too out and proud: “There is a certain thing of being proud. I’m black and proud you know what I mean but I’m not walking down the red carpet going ‘I’m black, I’m black.’” Banks’s advice is similar to how she views herself as a black public creative figure. Models of color can be proud that their skin tone makes them unique, but they must contain that pride within the post-racial, assimilationist boundaries of the modeling industry.

Another example of how ANTМ is an assimilationist program occurs during cycle seven (2006). The top-six model contestants are in Italy for the international destination. In the episode “The Girl Who Breaks Down,” the models shoot a Cover Girl cosmetic commercial with local male actors. Jaeda, an African American model-contestant, must work with a male model who tells her he does not like black women. During this episode, Banks meets with the models before the commercial. When Jaeda tells Banks about the situation, Banks responds: “He said he didn’t like black girls? Well you’re going to have to give him a kiss to make him love some black girls. Because what do they say? Once they go black . . . there you go!” Jaeda tries to take Banks’s advice but she is still uncomfortable around the male model. This results in Jaeda having the worst commercial of the group and being sent home. Banks and Jaeda do not mention the incident with the male model during the judging panel. According to Thompson (2010), models of color on ANTМ are “encouraged to exhibit pride in their ethnicity” but with limitations (339). The Jaeda-male model incident is an example of this. Banks’s advice to Jaeda references a phrase in popular culture, which Banks uses to make Jaeda see that her blackness makes her

---

598 Guido Verweyen, “The Girl with the Twisted Catchphrase,” in America’s Next Top Model (United States: UPN, 2005). Sexuality is treated on ANTМ in a similar fashion. The models can be out and proud but cannot be too out and proud. Models that focus too much on being the “America’s Next Top Lesbian Model” do not win. To date, there has not been an openly lesbian winner on ANTМ.

unique. Yet Jaeda does not take Banks’s advice and makes a horrible commercial. Jaeda did not embrace her blackness and was punished on the show by being eliminated. Jaeda was supposed to use her ethnicity, rise above, and deliver a stunning commercial.

This episode is an example of assimilationist moment because of Banks. On *ANTM*, Banks is known for sharing stories with the model-contestants about her struggles as a model. Yet Banks does not talk about a similar experience or remind Jaeda of the challenges of working in this industry as a model of color. In this situation, Banks cannot intervene because of the importance of Cover Girl to the show. Cover Girl has been a major supporter of the show since cycle two; one of the top prizes for “America’s Next Top Model” is a contract with the cosmetics company. Banks does not fire the male model that does not like black women. Instead, Banks plays it off and recommends that Jaeda kiss him to make him love black women. Jaeda must assimilate and do her job, which is getting the best shot for the client (Cover Girl).

While there are episodes such as “The Girl Who Breaks Down” that construct race in this fashion, there are also episodes of *ANTM* that are about race and reinforce that *ANTM* is an assimilationist program. For example, in the cycle 11 (2008) episode, “The Ladder of Model Success,” one model’s discomfort towards another model’s sexual orientation turns into a discussion about race. Hannah, a white model from Alaska, has an altercation with Isis, the aforementioned transgender African American model from Maryland. The altercation occurs in the hot tub at the model house. All of the models are in the hot tub playing truth or dare. During the game, Isis dances in the hot tub and almost backs into Hannah. Hannah prevents this from happening by pushing Isis. Isis apologizes and Hannah has an irritated look on her face. Isis and some of the other models are shocked by Hannah’s behavior. Hannah leaves the hot tub and

---

goes back into the house. One of the models deflects the situation by telling everyone to simmer down. The next shot is of all the models getting out of the hot tub.

Before the hot tub incident, Hannah is shown in the model confessional talking about being from a small town in Alaska and that she would not hang out with some of the models in real life, especially Isis because she is transgender. 601 Hannah is not the only model uncomfortable with Isis, but the interaction in the hot tub upsets the some of the other models. After the incident in the hot tub, two of Hannah’s roommates, Sheena and Brittany, talk with Hannah about what happened. Sheena is Asian and Brittany is African American. Sheena tells Hannah that she is surprised that Hannah would do that to another model. Hannah’s response has nothing to do with Isis being transgender:

Hannah: I just don’t appreciate it when like people coming up and start dancing on me. I’m like the stereotypical white person.
Brittany: What’s that?
Hannah: I don’t really like rap music. Like I’m not really loud. I’m not like going to walk into the room and be like HEY and just scream.
Brittany: Even though you’re the stereotypical white girl. I’m a black girl. And you know what? Someone could take that offensively.
Sheena: Just be more conscious and aware of what you put out.

Hannah then starts to cry. The scene cuts to Hannah in the model-confessional saying that Sheena and Brittany frustrated her because she was trying to be honest with them and she felt like they were trying to get a reaction from her. The show then returns back to the bedroom with Hannah, Sheena, and Brittany. Hannah tells her roommates, “I really wasn’t trying to offend anyone. I really didn’t mean that that way.” Brittany gently tells her again that she has to be careful of what she says. Issues of race, class, and region intersect and come to the forefront during this discussion and the conflict that occurs because of it.

601 The model confessional is a room in the model house in which the contestants talk to a camera about the competition, other models, etc. These confessionals are part of the ANTM narrative and are incorporated into the show.
The next day, most of the models of color (Brittany, Nikeysha, Joslyn, and Sheena) are in one of the bedrooms talking about the incident between Hannah and Isis (Off camera, Sheena and Brittany had told Nikeshya and Joslyn about their conversation with Hannah.)

Nikeysha is not upset that Hannah is uncomfortable with Isis being transgender: “The only thing I did think was wrong was for her to say stuff like ‘I’m the whitest white girl [sic].’” This cuts to a shot of Joslyn in the model-confessional admitting that things have changed in the house because of what Hannah may or may not have said. There is one model of color that is not involved in this conversation: Isis. She is shown as being in another part of the house taking her hormone injections.

The show then returns to modeling with a posing challenge, but once that is complete, the models are back at home. Nikeysha, Sheena, and Joslyn are in the living room talking about Hannah, and Brittany joins them. Nikeysha continues to talk about what Hannah said: “She’s like I hate people who don’t act like their own race and she’s white and she acts white and she likes to act white.” The scene then cuts to Nikeysha in the confessional saying: “A lot of girls in the house, especially the ethnic girls, do feel this little negative energy from Hannah because she’s throwing out the race card.” The show returns back to the living room to see Sheena tell the other models that Hannah is guilty of discrimination. At this point, Nikeshya decides that they need to talk to Hannah, and she leaves the room to go get her. Hannah and two other white models, Elina and Marjorie, join Sheena, Brittany, Joslyn, and Nikeshya in the living room. Joslyn starts the conversation by asking Hannah if she is prejudiced and if she has “problems with people of color.” Surprised, Hannah says no, thanks the other models for critiquing her and then leaves the room. Joslyn is shocked she left the room. Marjorie says Hannah felt ambushed.

---

602 Nikeshya and Joslyn are African American.
603 This is the first time the word “discrimination” is used. In the scene, Sheena stumbles upon this realization.
Joslyn tells Marjorie “y’all don’t know nothing about it. It’s something that I can only talk to her about.” The scene cuts to Hannah in the confessional crying; she says she cannot believe that they accused her of being racist. The next day Hannah talks to another model McKey (who is white) about the living room altercation and equates the ambush from the models to gang violence. McKey does not comment at all. The rest of the episode focuses on the photo shoot, judging, and elimination.

After this episode, the incident is not discussed again by the models in the house. Even when Hannah is eliminated two episodes later, there are no confessional scenes with Sheena or Joslyn. In fact, Sheena and Joslyn are the first to hug Hannah once she is eliminated. What is interesting about this episode is Isis’s absence. Viewers only see one scene in which Isis talks about the hot tub incident in the confessional. It occurs before the talk between Hannah, Sheena, and Brittany, and she makes a remark about the “claws coming out.” The interaction between Joslyn and Marjorie is interesting as well, because Joslyn tells Marjorie to stay out of it because Marjorie “don’t know nothing about it.” Yet Joslyn does not know anything about it either because she was not present for the original conversation between Hannah, Sheena, and Brittany.

The episode described above had the potential of being an example of a multiculturalist program, and in fact took steps toward that mode of representation by Sheena and Brittany talking with Hannah about her behavior towards Isis and her offensive comments. However, in the end, it reinforces ANTM as an assimilationist program. Although she is a model of color, Isis is excluded by the other models regarding the Hannah situation. The Hannah situation sidestepped the larger tension in the house, which is some of the models feeling uncomfortable with living and competing with a transgender model. Isis forms friendships in the house but they are mostly

---

604 Nikeshya was eliminated in the “Ladder of Model Success” episode. Brittany is eliminated in the following episode.
605 Tony Croll, "Fierce Eyes," in America's Next Top Model (United States The CW, 2008).
with the white models. Further, Isis’ time in the competition is short; she is eliminated in the fifth episode. With Isis, ANTM attempted to move beyond the dominant ideologies of the modeling industry by including a male-to-female transgender as a contestant. However, Isis could not handle the competition and started to perform poorly after the second photo shoot. This is a common narrative in reality shows in which contestants cannot handle the pressures of the competition. Cycle 11 serves as an example of producers taking steps toward greater diversity but ultimately by cutting the Isis narrative short, it becomes merely means of getting publicity for the show and functions as spectacle.

On ANTM, Isis’s transgender status supersedes the fact that she is also a model of color, which can be seen in her exclusion during the Hannah situation at the model house. This is the first time in the entire series in which there is a transgender finalist. The models’ discomfort with Isis is expected because it creates dramatic tension for the show. Like Erica Hahn on GA, Hannah violated the post-racial order on ANTM. Unlike GA, racial differences are discussed on ANTM, but only they relate to modeling. Racial differences are acceptable when it comes to photo shoots or as a way to make oneself stand out from the others. However, outside the photo shoot set or judging panel, ANTM is a post-racial world in which we have moved so far beyond race that race is never discussed at all, which is consistent with Banks’s image as a public creative figure.

---

606 Ibid.
607 In Isis’ last two episodes, the photo shoots involved the models wearing bathing suits. Isis did not feel comfortable during both shoots because she was concerned about her genitalia showing. At the time, Isis had just transitioned from male to female and had not undergone sex reassignment surgery. Isis has the surgery after cycle 11 in 2009.
608 This has never been part of the series. In the ANTM narrative, Isis was the first transgender semifinalist and finalist. Banks never discusses if there had been previous transgender applicants. Isis is a unique case study; she was discovered by Banks during cycle 10 (2008). Isis was a background model in one of the photo shoots. According to Banks, while going through the photos from that shoot she noticed Isis and told her staff that this girl must be part of the next cycle of ANTM. Banks then states that her staff told her that there was “something special” about Isis.
All of the models involved in the Hannah situation are punished for disrupting the post-racial environment: they are not “America’s Next Top Model.” The cycle 11 winner is McKey, who was not involved in the living room discussion and only seen listening to Hannah talk about it the next day. Also, McKey is one of the few contestants to befriend Isis and speak favorably about her to other models or in the model confessional. The top three finalists: McKey, Samantha, and Analeigh, all had nothing to do with the living room discussion. In this episode, Analeigh is shown helping Isis with her hormone injections. Analeigh represents the model that has evolved the most. During the semifinals, Analeigh does not comment about Isis but is seen with other girls that make snarky or transphobic comments about Isis. Analeigh’s faux pas is making a very shocked, mouth-wide-open, face when hearing about Isis. However, in the “Ladder of Model Success” episode, which is the third episode of the cycle, Analeigh redeemed herself by helping Isis. Samantha is also rewarded by not talking about Isis and not being involved with the other models in the living room.

*ANTM* is also at times multiculturalist because the show contains a variety of representations of blackness—from the model-contestants to the judges’ panel to other industry experts. There are also moments when Banks and the models discuss race and the challenges of being a model of color in the industry. For example, during the cycle eight (2007) casting session, a black model-contestant tells Banks that she went to Dartmouth and describes it as an all-white school. Banks responds, “that sounds like the fashion industry.”

She also tells the models of color that they will have to fight extra hard in the industry because of the color of their skin.

In cycle 12, Banks intentionally selects Sandra, a model-contestant from Kenya, because of her dark complexion. During the final casting when Banks asks Sandra to tell the panel the

---


610 Tony Croll, "Let's Go See the City,” in *America's Next Top Model* (United States The CW, 2009).
one thing she likes about herself, she replies that it is her skin. Banks then tells Sandra that is the reason she is there: “You are here because of your skin. I looked at your audition tape and I saw this beautiful, black mahogany girl. You got here because you chocolate and beautiful [sic].” Sandra becomes teary-eyed when Banks makes this statement, saying that women with her complexion do not feel pretty and that they should not be ashamed of their dark skin. In the previous chapter, I discussed how Banks uses *ANTM* as a platform to present models of all colors, shapes, and sizes. After 11 cycles, this remains an important issue for Banks. The inclusion of Banks’s statement and Sandra’s reaction highlights the issue of skin tone bias within the African American community. Banks has acknowledged the tensions within the African American community over skin tone and says this tension is one of the reasons she created the show: “Why are white people in the fashion industry . . . saying this [dark skin] is beautiful but my own community is not saying this is beautiful . . . I used the power that I have, which is casting girls on *Top Model.*” Sandra, like Isis, only lasts for six episodes. She is also another example of how *ANTM* gestures at times toward more progressive acts but ultimately pulls back.

Another exploration of a topic from multiple perspectives is hair. During the makeover day, the African American models either have their hair cut completely off or they receive long, wavy weaves. Yet weaves and extensions are not limited to the models of color. Banks also requires the white models to change their hair this way. Viewers watch white models go through the long tedious process of hair weaves and extensions on makeover day and after. For example, in cycle eight, one of the white models receives a weave. During the judges’ panel, the model pats the top of her head. Banks notices and responds, “You’re doing the black girl pat. That’s

---

611 In this chapter, all quotes are from the series without any changes in spelling or grammar. Croll, "What Happens in Vegas."

what you do when your hair weave itches." On the show, viewers watch the painful and tedious process of getting a weave or extensions. All of the models’ experiences with this process connects to a larger issue within the African American community, which is the debate over natural vs. real hair.

This debate has been part of the ANTM universe since the first cycle. For example, during the final casting process, Banks makes models of color take off their long extensions to show their natural hair. During a different cycle, she tells model Anchal, “Like I know I’m such a slave with this damn thing on my head. . . Next step is me sporting a fro. I’ll get there.” In cycle 12, Banks says to model Angelea, “I would love to be one with you and take mine off too but we’re not going to do that. Not today.” It is not until cycle 14 in 2009 that Banks wears her hair naturally. Yet understanding that the industry is a business, she continues to make models receive weaves and extensions on makeover day.

What makes ANTM a multiculturalist show is that it does address issues within the African American community and American society but with limitations. Starting in cycle eight, the models participate in topical photo shoots, usually in the second episode. For example in cycle eight, the theme was controversial political issues relating to women’s rights, animal rights, marriage, capital punishment, and the second amendment. For cycle 11, which aired in the fall of 2008, the themed photo shoot involved the importance of voting and again was tied to political issues. Each model posed in front of a voting booth and represented topics such as healthcare, unemployment, immigration, environment, cloning, and homeland security. With the cycle 11

---

616 Croll, "What Happens in Vegas."
shoot (which aired just before the election), Mr. Jay, the show’s creative director for every photo shoot, and Banks stressed the importance of voting to the models (and viewers at home). Banks tells the contestants that she designed this shoot to inspire people to go vote because “voting is a right and a responsibility.”

In cycle 12, Banks created a photo shoot in which the models were depicted as innocent girls playing childhood games. This was designed to serve as a statement about girls growing up too fast. The shoot consisted of the model-contestants as little girls and professional models representing ways girls grow up too fast (e.g., teen pregnancy and drug usage). Teenage pregnancy is a concern within the African American community as well as with larger American society. Banks not only made this a photo shoot but also talked about the importance of this topic during the judging panel. At the time this cycle was shot (fall 2008), there had been a 5% increase in teenage pregnancy in the United States since 2005.

In cycle 15, the models participated in a photo shoot about bullying. All of the models reveal a word that has been used to negatively describe them. The models also must place a second word that trumps the “bullying word” on their skin. This photo shoot is an example in which Kacey turns on her “optional ethnicity” switch. For her shoot, her bully word is “Oreo.” She says that “I was teased for acting white, for talking white, for dressing white.” Kacey’s empowering words are “Nubian Queen.” Kacey is not the only model of color to incorporate race into her photo shoot. Liz states that growing up she was called “mutt” because of her mixed racial background. In her shoot, she uses the phrase “bi-racial beauty” to override the derogatory term. Terra, an African American model, said kids teased her for her big lips and called her “soup cooler.” Her empowering phrase was “luscious lips.” In the United States, bullying has

---

gone from a childhood rite-of-passage to an important social issue. Within the African American community, bullying has become a matter of concern because of the increase in children/teen suicides because of bullying. Denise Stewart (2012) states that “bullying is an increasing problem for children in African-American community, but there are not a lot of statistics that reflect the trend.” Psychologist Yvette Harris (2012) argues that this is an unknown topic within the African American community because “most of the statistics point to problems in white, suburban communities.” The bullying photo shoot is also an example of the differences between whiteness and blackness on **ANTM**. The white models’ bullying words were not associated with their race. For example, kids teased Ann about her height, calling her “giant.” Growing up, Lexie was teased about her “elf ears” and Anamaria’s peers made fun of her “bucktooth.” Again this reinforces the power of whiteness. The models of color were teased because of their “non-white” status whereas the white models were teased about facial features/height.

The problem with **ANTM** being both an assimilationist and multiculturalist program is the mixed messages it sends to its viewers as a result. As discussed in Chapter Two, the primary audience for The CW is women 18-34. **ANTM** functions as an assimilationist program because it conforms to the modeling industry’s (white) criteria for success. Yet there are breaks in the assimilationist framework, in which the show switches into multicultural moments, especially when Banks addresses the challenges of being a model of color in the industry. I also discussed in Chapter Three how Banks designed the show to promote different types of beauty. There are also moments on **ANTM**, in which Banks exposes the model-contestants (and viewers) to multiple perspectives of blackness. For example, the models have participated in African American

---

hair shows, watched step shows, visited places of historical significance to the African American community, and worked with African American fashion designers specializing in urban fashion and haute couture. The increase in topical photo shoots is also Banks’s way of highlighting important issues to the show’s young audience. Yet these moments are overshadowed by the fact that the models must use their uniqueness as a commodity while also conforming to mainstream (white) standards. *ANTM*’s assimilationist format is similar to The CW’s structure from 2005-2010 in which the netlet increased its programming to target white younger viewers but maintained vestiges of black-oriented programs to appeal to African American viewers.

4.7 Conclusion

My goal with this research project thus far has been to explore how Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry, and the programs they oversee serve as vital case studies to a study of the history of race and television. All three have been working at an interesting moment industrially and culturally. They were present and active during a key moment in TV: When the Cosby Era ended and the Neo-Cosby Moment began. In the Neo-Cosby Moment, there have been several notable industrial and aesthetic changes. As discussed in Chapter Two, the television industry is in a transitional moment. The Neo-Cosby Moment is linked to new programming forms such as reality television and the expansion of black-oriented programming beyond the broadcast networks to cable. Although Banks, Rhimes, and Perry have been very successful television executive producers and creators, their success has not resulted in an increase in diversity behind the scenes. Multicultural ensemble dramas and reality shows expanded African American diversity on television, but that diversity did not extend to production. As I have demonstrated with Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as case studies, in terms of representation as it relates to
diversity, as of 2010, we remained in the late stages of the multi-channel transition and not the emerging post-network era as defined by Lotz.

There is also a connection between the industry and the text; industrial conditions clearly shape and influence textual forms. Black-feathered shows such as Grey’s Anatomy and America’s Next Top Model are the dominant programming forms for representations of blackness on the broadcast networks. Black-feathered shows provide the networks with the façade of diversity. Having doctors of color on GA or model-contestants of color on ANTM as well as Shonda Rhimes and Tyra Banks working behind the scenes make ABC and The CW look like they diversifying the television industry while they continue to schedule shows with white leads (and white executive producer/creators). Yet cable has not proven to be a panacea, either. Although TBS added black-oriented programs to its original programming lineup, it was not for altruistic reasons – nor was it a long-lasting move. The basic cable channel largely adapted the black-oriented sitcom template used by NBC, Fox, and UPN/The WB/The CW in the 1990s and early 2000s to attract neglected viewers. This chapter explored the representational changes that occurred during the Neo-Cosby Moment by using Grey’s Anatomy, America’s Next Top Model and House of Payne as case studies to examine contemporary representations of blackness on primetime television. This chapter also adds another layer to examining blackness on television in the neo-racial, Neo-Cosby Moment because it explores the narrative and representational context of key texts.

Grey’s Anatomy, House of Payne, and America’s Next Top Model present blackness in different ways. This analysis reveals that GA is an assimilationist program in which race is seen as an individual problem and racism is a thing of the past. They might be doctors but they are...
just as limited as other African American characters on assimilationist shows. My analysis also
developments that \textit{HOP} is a multiculturalist program because of the diversity of characters and story-
lines related to the African American community. \textit{GA} and \textit{HOP} demonstrate that Gray’s terms
remain a useful lens for examining televisual representations of blackness in the Neo-Cosby
Moment. The fact that Gray’s terms remain a useful means to examining blackness on television
and diversity behind the scenes demonstrates that the mainstream broadcast networks and basic
cable channels remain in the multi-channel transition and not in the emerging post-network era,
especially with regards to textual representation. However, the serialized nature of both shows
demonstrates that Gray’s terms need some modification. Yet as seen in my analysis of \textit{ANTM},
reality television complicates Gray’s terms. In the Neo-Cosby Moment, a new lens is needed to
examine reality television in particular.

My analysis also supports Dubrofsky and Hardy’s assessment that the broadcast networks
continue to support a white middle-class identity. Although \textit{ANTM} has diverse selection of
model-finalists, the models of color must conform to mainstream standards. \textit{GA}’s lack of black-
ness is more problematic than the inclusion of stereotypes on \textit{HOP} because the African Amer-
ican characters are isolated and removed from the African American community. On \textit{HOP}, the
stereotypical characters and behaviors are balanced by the other characters. In addition, the nar-
ratives on \textit{HOP} allow all the characters on the show to present a range of behaviors and respons-

Fursich (2009) states that “Textual analysts need to establish the \textit{ideological potential} of
the text between production and consumption. The question is not how accurately does the text
reflect reality but what version of reality is normalized, and as a consequence, how emancipatory

\footnotesize{Also generic hybrids need to be viewed in different terms in the Neo-Cosby Moment.}
Television shows such as *Grey’s Anatomy*, *America’s Next Top Model*, and *House of Payne* have social functions; how these programs present characters of color impacts contemporary society (Means Coleman 2003). My analysis of *GA* supports Joseph and Esposito’s claims that media reinforces the myth of a post-racial society—this in spite of the fact that a neo-racial view needs to be adopted. On *GA*, Drs. Webber, Bailey, Burke, Yang, and Torres are proof that race is inconsequential. If characters violate the post-racial order, they are chastised or removed from the world of Seattle Grace Hospital. *ANTM* also reinforces a post-racial society myth by using the modeling industry as a scapegoat. Banks can change the public’s perception about models and what is beauty with *ANTM* but she cannot change the modeling industry. Her *ANTM* models must be unique but also be able to assimilate to book jobs. The neo-racial ruptures on *ANTM* are not enough to dominate the post-racial ideology on the program. Of the three, *HOP* is the only show to embody a neo-racial ideology. The show addresses issues such as racial and class tensions. However, its programming form, a sitcom, and the presence of familiar stereotypes, make it difficult for critics to take seriously.

5 CONCLUSION

*In 1995 Oprah Winfrey asked the cast of Friends, with a combination of longing and edge, “Could you all get a black friend to stop over?” TV’s overwhelmingly white-on-white color scheme has improved since then. But it’s still too easy to pretend that head count alone solves the problem. . . There’s little doubt that as long as white writers, producers, and execs dominate television, not much will change. Until then, TV’s take on race will remain timid to the point of dishonesty. Often, when a comedy or drama includes non-white characters, their function is to illustrate the principle that race doesn’t matter. But no sane person who has watched the news in the past four years, four months, or four weeks can argue*  

that we’re living in a post-racial society or that there’s nothing more to talk about, and shows that attempt to solve their diversity problem by imagining that casting equals content can edge dangerously close to tokenism.

Mark Harris- Entertainment Weekly

The above quote comes from a May 2012 article entitled “TV’s Diversity Dilemma.” Harris starts the article with a discussion of the new HBO show Girls (2012-) and how the show is great—except that the cast lacks diversity. This quote reinforces what I have been doing throughout this research project. Regardless of whether we believe we are in the multi-channel transition or post-network era, Cosby Era or Neo-Cosby Moment, diversity on-screen and behind the scenes remains problematic in the contemporary television landscape. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that a neo-racial framework provides the best lens for exploring issues of blackness and television. We can connect this lens to the Harris quote. He admits that diversity on television is better than it was in 1995 and does not identify racism as the sole cause for the current “diversity dilemma” on television. A neo-racial framework acknowledges that any discussions or examinations of race in American society must include historical, social, and contextual factors. For Harris, the issue of diversity starts with the amount of white control behind the scenes and the depiction of characters of color onscreen, which intersects with my research project. Harris’s “diversity dilemma” is complex and we must examine the interplay of historical and contemporary factors. Tyra Banks, Shonda Rhimes, and Tyler Perry are vital case studies that help us study these intersections in greater detail.

The industrial context is important for examining Banks, Rhimes, and Perry as case studies because they are exceptions to the rule in terms of blackness onscreen and power behind the scenes. As seen in Chapter Two, all three are important figures in the Neo-Cosby Moment be-

---

cause of their achievements and success in an industry which continues to struggle with the inclusion of African Americans in key positions behind the scenes. Shonda Rhimes and Tyra Banks demonstrate that African Americans behind the scenes are not limited to black-oriented sitcoms. Yet Rhimes and Banks’s success did not result in an increase in black-themed shows or African Americans in key positions behind the scenes at “mass” appeal broadcast networks like ABC or The CW. Industrially, The CW and ABC promote a post-racial ideology in which race is inconsequential, as evidenced in both networks use of multicultural ensemble dramas and reality programs. Both programming forms increased diversity on-screen but did not have the same impact behind the scenes. It took seven years for Shonda Rhimes to have a show with an African American lead (Scandal). TBS was the only one to increase the amount of original programming starring African Americans from 2006-2010. Tyler Perry, who has had tremendous success with black-oriented sitcoms, the traditional outlet for African Americans working in television, also shows that the black-oriented sitcom remains a popular programming form. His business model for the creation and distribution of House of Payne has since been used for other basic cable sitcoms. Meet the Browns and Are We There Yet? first aired ten episodes followed by a 100 episode order by TBS. This model is now being expanded beyond black-oriented shows. In 2012, FX ordered 90 additional episodes after a ten-episode run of the Charlie Sheen sitcom Anger Management (2012-). George Lopez plans to use the same model to make his sitcom return in 2013.625

One key way Banks, Rhimes, and Perry have been able to carve a unique path within the television industry is through their status as public creative figures. As discussed in Chapter Three, control is an important component to their image as a key creative figure. All three reg-

625 Both Anger Management and the untitled George Lopez sitcom are distributed by Debmar-Mercury. Susan Young, “Marketers Pull out the Stops to Get Good Starts,” Variety, September 15 2009.
larly discuss their contribution behind the scenes with the mainstream and black press. Yet how each discusses race in their image as a black public creative figure provides insight into larger discussions of race with the television industry and American society. Rhimes and Banks never discuss what it is like being black women working as executive producers in an industry where there are few African American women showrunners. They have to elide discussions of race and gender. Their discussions of race as it relates to the television industry promote the myth of a colorblind/post-racial society, which is dangerous because there are few African Americans in positions of power behind the scenes in television and in order to help remedy that situation attention should/must be called to it by them. Yet the industrial context provides an explanation for why Banks and Rhimes do not discuss race. Their previous success in other areas, such as film and modeling, gave Banks and Rhimes opportunities that other African American women working in television typically do not have. Banks and Rhimes did not start their careers in television in black-oriented sitcoms, which meant that they did not have television executives wondering if they could write “outside the black box.” Rhimes had written the screenplays for Crossroads and The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement, both starring white actresses. Banks’s success as a supermodel gave her the opportunity to create and pitch a reality show about modeling. Banks and Rhimes have both effectively operated within the industrial confines of the broadcast networks. Obviously Perry’s prior success in film provided him with the financial resources to try something different when it came to creating and distributing a television program. Although trying to be a de facto broadcast network, TBS does not have the scheduling pressures of a broadcast network, which has allowed the outlet to take a chance on Perry and order 100 episodes of HOP. Perry’s financial success in film and television provided him with a

---

626 In Chapter One, I discussed how Sara Finney-Johnson, an African American executive producer and writer, had difficulty working on other shows besides black oriented sitcoms because of the industry misconceptions that she could not write “outside the black box.” Johnson, "The Business of Television Writing."
luxury that Banks and Rhimes did not have: he could be more open and honest about race in the media industries. While Banks and Rhimes ignore this topic in public conversations, Perry is explicit in his view that things are not equal. In their roles as public creative figures, Banks and Rhimes present images of a post-racial society, and Perry’s perspective as a public creative figure aligns with a neo-racial perspective, where he acknowledges the triumphs as well as the inequities for African Americans onscreen and behind the scenes.

The ways that Banks, Rhimes, and Perry negotiate their roles as black public creative figures plays a part in how racial representation is presented in their texts. In the first chapter, I identified Grey’s Anatomy as a black-themed program because the show contains African American characters but primarily focuses on the lead character, Meredith Grey. Rhimes’s post-racial ideology can be seen throughout the run of the series. GA is an assimilationist program and rarely incorporates race into its narrative even though it has a diverse cast. While Banks explores the topic of race more frequently on ANTM than in the discourse surrounding it, her show uses race as a commodity for the model-contestants to employ to their advantage. Further, models of color on the show must maintain a balance between utilizing their race/ethnicity to make themselves unique yet not appearing too racial or ethnic in the process. Perry’s neo-racial ideology can be seen throughout House of Payne in that the show addresses racial tensions as well as important issues within the African American community. There is also a connection between how blackness is presented on each of these programs and the industrial context in which they thrive. Even though GA and ANTM are successful programs, they are still part of the broadcast network system, which has more constraints than basic cable. Both Rhimes and Banks have talked about the

---

Gender could also factor in the differences between Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s vocalizations about race and media. As a man, Perry can be candid and praised for his honesty whereas if Banks and Rhimes said the same things they could be perceived as bitter or bitchy.
network’s presence during pre- and post-production. According to Perry, TBS maintained more of a hands-off approach during *HOP*’s run (a product of his distinctive distribution model).

What I have shown throughout this project is that in terms of diversity, we remain in the multi-channel transition and not the emerging post-network era. I have also illustrated that an in-depth analysis of the industrial context in which Banks, Rhimes, and Perry have found success, the ways in which they position themselves as black public creative figures, and the texts that they produce demonstrates the utility of a neo-racial lens for studying diversity on screen and behind the scenes. A neo-racial lens offers a theoretical bridge between the extended multi-channel transition and the forthcoming post-network era as it relates to diversity.

5.1 Epilogue: Developments Since 2010

Industrially two big shifts occurred after the time frame under examination in my study: changes in the power structure of ABC and The CW. On 27 July 2010, Stephen McPherson resigned as president of ABC Entertainment. I did not discuss McPherson’s resignation in Chapter Two because it did not result in a drastic change to the fall 2010 schedule. While McPherson’s exit was abrupt, *Variety* claimed that he would have been out eventually because the network had been struggling in the ratings, the shows that helped ABC make a turnaround were near their expiration dates, and the network had not found successful replacements for these shows. Although the network’s Wednesday night comedy block (e.g., *Modern Family*, *The Middle*, *Cougar Town*) provided a resurgence for ABC as a comedy power, the show’s biggest comedy on that night, *Modern Family*, is produced by Twentieth Century Fox, which translates to less profit for ABC.628 According to *Hollywood Reporter*, the main reason McPherson left ABC was because...

---

he was under investigation for sexual harassment charges.\textsuperscript{629} ABC replaced McPherson with ABC Family president Paul Lee.\textsuperscript{630} As of this writing, Lee remains in this position. Under his leadership, ABC has shifted to more soapy serialized dramas such as \textit{Once Upon a Time} (2011- ), \textit{Revenge} (2011- ), \textit{Scandal} (2012- ), and \textit{Nashville} (2012- ).

In March 2011, The CW announced that Dawn Ostroff would be leaving the network before the May upfronts. After 10 years, Ostroff claimed that she was ready for a change and wanted to move back to New York to be with her family.\textsuperscript{631} On 28 April 2011, The CW announced Ostroff’s replacement as president of entertainment: Mark Pedowitz. Pedowitz came from ABC. In 2004, he replaced McPherson as the head of Touchstone Television. In 2009, he left that position to work as a senior advisor for the ABC Entertainment Group.\textsuperscript{632} Pedowitz has been working on broadening The CW’s demographics to younger males with shows such as \textit{The L.A. Complex} (2012-2012), \textit{Arrow} (2012- ), and \textit{Cult} (2012- ). These industrial leadership changes have not resulted in any significant changes in terms of racial representation on-screen or diversity behind the scenes. From 2010-2012, both networks only added one show with an actor/actress of color in a starring role. The CW’s \textit{Nikita} (2010- ) stars Vietnamese actress Maggie Q, and African American actress Kerry Washington stars in ABC’s \textit{Scandal}. The WGA reports that “women and minority writers experienced little progress, if any relative to their male and white counterparts” from 2009-2011.\textsuperscript{633}


\textsuperscript{630} Before working for ABC Family (2004-2010), Lee was CEO of BBC America.


The success of black-oriented sitcoms on TBS resulted in basic cable channels BET and TV One starting to air original scripted sitcoms. This shift was also due to basic cable’s need to retain viewers and sustain subscriber fees with original programming. In January 2011, *Love That Girl* premiered on TV One. *Love* is TV One’s first original scripted program since the cable channel launched in 2004. In addition, BET launched two sitcoms: *The Game* and *Let’s Stay Together*. *The Game* is a unique potential case study for future research because the series originated on The CW. It was one of the new programs launched on that network in 2006. The series was created by Mara Brock Akil, creator and executive producer of *Girlfriends* and was one of the few black-oriented sitcoms to make the transition to the netlet. The CW cancelled the series in 2009. The broadcast network claimed that it wanted to only focus on one hour dramatic programming. Over 7 million viewers watched *The Game*’s first live broadcast on BET. \(^{634}\) *The Game* had more viewers for its BET premiere than its last episode on The CW (1.8M). \(^{635}\) *The Game* averaged 4.3 M viewers during its first/fourth season on BET. \(^{636}\) As of this writing, all three shows are still on the air and BET added a third sitcom, *Reed Between the Lines*, in November 2011. BET and TV One are not the only basic cable channels to add black-oriented programs to their prime-time lineups. VH1, TVLand, and ABC Family added black-oriented programs with *Single Ladies* (VH1, 2011- ), *The Soul Man* (TVLand, 2012- ), and *State of Georgia* (ABC Family, 2011). \(^{637}\)

Despite this expansion on other networks, in fall 2011, TBS moved *HOP, Meet the Browns*, and *Are We There Yet?* to what is widely considered the ratings wasteland of Friday nights. The basic cable network also added a third Tyler Perry sitcom, *For Better or Worse* to

\(^{634}\) Armstrong, Ram, and Stack, "The Rise & Fall and Rise Again of Black TV."

\(^{635}\) Stransky.


\(^{637}\) This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.
the Friday schedule. This show followed the traditional Perry pattern of 10 test episodes. This time, however, TBS did not order an additional 90 shows. Instead it only ordered 35 episodes of the show. This show is very different from HOP and MTB in that it is not as family friendly and focuses more on adult situations. TBS also announced that they would not be ordering any additional episodes of HOP or MTB. MTB ended its 140-episode run in November 2011. HOP ended in August 2012 with 254 episodes. HOP replaced The Jeffersons (253 episodes) as the black-oriented sitcom with the greatest number of episodes that aired on television. Are We There Yet returns for a new season in fall 2012 but not on Friday nights. New episodes air on Friday afternoons. The Friday move for all of Perry’s shows and Are We There Yet? suggests that TBS is marginalizing its black-oriented programming and proceeding with a similar broadcast network template. Like Fox and The CW, TBS is moving to act more like a broadcast network and favoring its other more mass appeal (i.e., white) shows.

During the announcement of the cancellation of MTB, TBS announced new sitcoms coming in 2012. The basic cable channel launched three new comedies, Men at Work (2012- ), Sullivan and Son (2012 - ), and The Wedding Band (2012 - ). Men and The Wedding Band star white actors Danny Matheson (That ’70s Show, Fox 1998-2006) and Brian Austin Green (Beverly Hills 90210). Sullivan stars comedian Steve Byrne, who is half white and half Korean. TBS continues to struggle with launching original shows; its syndicated fare, especially The Big Bang Theory, has proved far more successful in ratings. TBBT averages three million viewers an episode, whereas Men at Work generates 2.7 M and Sullivan and Son averages 2.5 M. TBS used BBT as a lead-in to boost both shows’ ratings.

638 The episodes were self-financed by Perry and Debmar-Mercury.
639 There were 215 episodes of Family Matters and 201 of The Cosby Show.
5.2 Limitations of Study

The biggest limitation of this study was the relatively brief time frame covered, 2005-2010. In the interest of examining my case studies and their shows within the larger industrial context, I only analyzed the first five years of the Neo-Cosby Moment. My goal with this project was to illustrate how this period was a defining historical moment in the history of blackness on television and behind the scenes. A second limitation of this study was the exclusion of detailed descriptions of other African Americans working behind the scenes on broadcast and cable networks. For example, Felicia Henderson worked as an executive producer on *Fringe* (Fox) and *Gossip Girl* (The CW). Mara Brock Akil was a consulting producer on *Cougar Town* (ABC) during its first season. Pam Veasey worked as an executive producer on *CSI: NY* (CBS) and was an executive producer on *Ringer* (The CW, 2011-2012). These three figures prove that Banks, Rhimes, and Perry are not the only African Americans in positions of power behind the scenes. However, their work behind the scenes is not as publicized or promoted as much as Banks, Rhimes, and Perry. None have attained the “public creative figure” status of my three case studies.

Also, this dissertation has only examined industrial and textual/representational changes related to basic cable. I mainly focused on industrial shifts on the basic cable station TBS. I did not use BET or TV One as case studies. My rationale for not examining these two important channels in the history of African American representation is twofold. First, BET has been thoroughly examined by Beretta Smith-Shomade. Second, TV One launched in 2004 and has mostly relied on syndicated black-oriented sitcoms for its schedule. As discussed in the previous section, in 2011 BET and TV One added black-oriented sitcoms to their lineups. As of this writing,
BET has comedies *The Game, Let’s Stay Together*, and *Reading Between the Lines*. Further, the channel announced three new shows coming in the 2012-13 season: comedies *Real Husbands of Hollywood* and *Second Generation* and *Gun Hill*, BET’s first scripted drama.\(^{642}\) TV One added *The Rickey Smiley Show* (2012- ) and two new sitcoms *Belle* and *Church Folk* will air in 2013. Such moves suggest broader changes in the post-2010 landscape worthy of more analysis.

In addition, during this period, VH1 diversified representations of blackness onscreen with its increase of reality shows featuring African Americans such as *Flavor of Love, Basketball Wives* (2010- ), and *Lala’s Full Court Life* (2011-), *Love and Hip Hop* (2011-), *T.I. and Tiny: The Family Hustle* (2011-), *Single Ladies* (2011-), *Basketball Wives: LA* (2011-), *Hollywood Exes* (2012-), *Love and Hip Hop: Atlanta* (2012-). Bravo’s *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, a spinoff of *Real Housewives of Orange County*, was also a ratings success for the basic cable channel. TVLand aired its first black-oriented sitcom: *The Soul Man* (2012-).\(^{643}\) Additional studies might address how black-oriented reality programs have thrived on cable and compare it to previous black-oriented reality shows (e.g., *Flavor of Love, College Hill*). Studying these shows could indicate that a new framework is needed to examine representations of blackness on reality programs.

The success of these programs is important to examine in the Neo-Cosby Moment. Expanding my analysis to these basic cable channels and programs illustrates a growing shift of black-oriented programming from the broadcast networks to basic cable in the Neo-Cosby Moment. VH1 is particularly interesting because it contains black-oriented reality and scripted series. Although not a sitcom, *TI and Tiny: The Family Hustle*, a 30-minute reality show about

---

\(^{642}\) These shows will premiere in late 2012 or early 2013.

\(^{643}\) *The Soul Man* is TVLand’s fifth original scripted comedy. TVLand’s other comedies are: *Hot in Cleveland* (2010- ), *Retired at 35* (2010- ), *The Exes* (2011- ), and *Happily Divorced* (2011- ).
rapper TI and his family, has been called the hip-hop version of the Huxtable family. Single Ladies is an hour-long drama about three friends living in Atlanta. Queen Latifah is an executive producer on the series. Studying the aforementioned shows and their creators and executive producers could prove that we are not in a Neo-Cosby Moment but a Neo-Cable Moment for representations of blackness onscreen and diversity behind the scenes.

5.3 Future Areas of Research

Future research could start with theorizing the Neo-Cosby Moment and exploring the intersections of race with gender onscreen and behind the scenes. The original scripted programs on BET and TV One are an excellent starting point. The executive producers and writers for these shows have worked on other black-oriented sitcoms and thus can speak with authority about the broader TV landscape. For example, Bentley Kyle Evans, the creator and executive producer for Love That Girl, worked as a writer and executive producer on Martin and The Jamie Foxx Show. Kellie Griffin, creator of Reed Between the Lines, worked as a writer and producer on House of Payne. In addition the stars of these shows were iconic figures on past black-oriented sitcoms. Tatyana Ali, star of Love That Girl, was on Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. Reed Between the Lines stars Tracee Ellis Ross and Malcom-Jamal Warner. Ross starred for eight seasons on Girlfriends, and Warner was one of the Huxtable kids on The Cosby Show. There has emerged on cable a rich network of talent that can speak with breadth of historical knowledge about long standing practices and recent changes behind the scenes on black-oriented shows on broadcast and cable.

---

Another research possibility involves examining African American non-public creative figures behind the scenes. For example, Stan Lathan has been working as a director on black-oriented sitcoms since the 1980s. His resume includes *Frank’s Place*, *Martin*, *Roc*, *Moesha*, *The Steve Harvey Show*, *All of Us*, and *The Soul Man*. Janice Cooke has directed episodes of *The Division* (Lifetime, 2001-2004), *One Tree Hill*, *Gossip Girl*, and *Ringer*. Paris Barclay works as a director and producer. He has directed episodes of *Sons of Anarchy* (FX, 2008-), *Glee*, *In Treatment* (HBO, 2008-), and *CSI*. Film cinematographer Ernest Dickerson directed episodes of *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-) and *Treme* (HBO, 2010-). Cooke and Barclay prove that directors are not limited to the “black box” like African American black-oriented sitcom writers are. Furthermore, most of the black-oriented programs on TBS, VH1, BET, and TV One are shot in one location: Atlanta, GA. The city is gaining a reputation as a production hub for black-oriented shows (and films). An ethnography exploring the practices behind the scenes at these shows could offer insight about the role that blackness plays in the creative process and the value of a specific geographic creative center in which such talent can thrive.

In addition, web series and online content should be explored for their place in relation to the Neo-Cosby Moment. Isa Rae’s popular web series, *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* (2011-) started its second season in summer of 2012; the series’ first season had over 450,000 viewers. BET’s first web series, *Buppies* (2009-2010), was created and produced by Tatyana Ali (*Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*), who also starred in the series. Currently BET has the web series *8 Days a Week* (2011-), its first in-house produced show; in fall 2012 the basic cable

---

645 Although some of the aforementioned directors have been referenced in scholarly works, they have not been examined in as much detail as other African American executive producers, writers, and actors/actresses. Zook talks about Lathan briefly in *Color By Fox*.

646 Hillary Crosley, "Emf Q&A: 'Awkward Black Girl' Creator Issa Rae Talks Meeting Pharrell Williams & Season Two," *Essence* (2012) (accessed June 7, 2012). Rae also has a deal with Shonda Rhimes’ production company, Shondaland, to develop a TV series, *I Hate LA Dudes*. In October 2012, Shondaland sold the sitcom to ABC. Shonda Rhimes runs Shondaland, and the production company’s expansion to non-Rhimes projects is a future avenue of study.
channel is distributing the web series *Asylum* (2010-) on multiple BET platforms. Web series are increasingly becoming a means by which networks “test run” shows and experiment with new talent.

Lastly, future research could look for issues of reception in more detail. The only area of reception I examined in this study was ratings, which is the industry’s artificial construction of the audience. Future studies should examine how actual/”real” audience members respond to *America’s Next Top Model, Grey’s Anatomy, and House of Payne*, as well as the aforementioned shows on BET, TV One, Bravo, and VH1. Additional research in this area could include an examination of white and black viewers as well as and other viewers of color. All three shows of my case studies are especially popular with female viewers. Future work could also explore the intersections of race, gender, and class in greater detail. *GA, ANTM, and HOP* could not survive on their respective networks without wider audiences watching. Yet the number of white viewers is not enough to lead to more of these types of programs on ABC, The CW, or TBS. Although TBS did increase the number of black oriented-sitcoms from 2005-2010, the current landscape tells a different story. As noted above *HOP, Meet the Browns, and Are We There Yet?* were moved from Wednesday nights to Friday nights in November 2011. Friday nights are not the best nights to schedule new programming because a significant number of households use that time to watch shows on their DVRs. Thus while there has been an expansion of black-oriented shows on other cable outlets and online platforms, more mass appeal/ general entertainment oriented broadcast and cable outlets continue to move away from such programming.

---


5.4 Final Remarks

This dissertation makes a significant contribution to both critical race studies and television studies. My case studies have demonstrated the utility of a critical media industry studies approach utilizing D’Acci’s circuit of media study. By exploring the industrial landscape, Banks, Rhimes, and Perry’s role as public creative figures, and the texts with which they have been involved, we get a better sense of what has taken place in the public discourse and on our television screens in terms of blackness. This study does not limit the examination of the text to the good/bad stereotype dichotomy but rather explores how a variety of representations (stereotypes included) are needed to truly have a diversity onscreen.

In the neo-racial, Neo-Cosby Moment, the televisual landscape for blackness onscreen and behind the scenes remains problematic. Although the Cosby Era appears to be the pinnacle for diversity onscreen and off-screen thus far, the Neo-Cosby Moment is just as important to explore in detail. The fact that African Americans are now part of ensemble casts and are not limited to bit roles on procedural dramas is a move in the right direction. The Neo-Cosby Moment might make a bigger impact once we are fully in the post-network era. Yet the arrival of the post-network era will not necessarily be a panacea for diversity; other issues such as continued audience fragmentation, increased production costs and decreased advertising rates will have an impact on racial representation and industrial power that are difficult to determine at this time. Also the larger social and cultural context will influence programming. For example, in spring 2012, comedian Bryon Allen announced his plans to launch a new syndicated comedy, The First Family, about the second African American President of the United States. Although Bryon states that the show is not about the Obamas, critics are already making those comparisons based
on the series’ description. As of this writing, the Neo-Cosby Moment is situated within the existing late-stage multichannel transition. Until the industry makes a more complete shift to the post-network era, representations onscreen as well as diversity behind the scenes will remain problematic. Although there are no guarantees that the post-network era will resolve these issues, at least it holds the promise of an increase in diversity in the entire industry.

WORKS CITED


________. "Upfront Blueprint: CW Ditching Traditional Presentation." Variety, April 11 2008, 2;18.


_______. "Nets Play the Rating Game." Variety, October 8-14 2007, 14;16.


_______. "Rhimes on Touchstone Staff to '09." Hollywood Reporter, June 5 2006, 1; 54.


"You Are the First to Know." 2010, 2010.


"Is This the CW's New Reality?" *Broadcasting & Cable*, March 26 2007, 12-13.


"Brand X." Broadcasting & Cable, January 30 2006, 11.


Burroughs, Todd Steven "Casting Call." The Crisis, Winter 2009, 10-14.


http://www.tv.com/story/6616.html?q=7th%20heaven&tag=search_results;additional_links;0 [accessed October 5].


"Tyra Banks: Success as Fashion Model and Businesswoman Makes Her a Role Model." *Jet*, October 30 2006, 60-64.


Crupi, Anthony, and John Consoli. "Post-UPN, Ethnic Grps Are in Play BET and TV One Will Duke It out with Mtv, Fox, Syndication and Broadband for $100 Million." MediaWeek, April 10 2006, 6-7.


________. "Veasey's Road to Drama Showrunner Cobbled with Industry Preconceptions."  


"The Faces to See on Fall TV." Jet, October 2 2006.


Fleetwood, Nicole R. "Are We There Yet? Yearnings for a Discursive Shift in Black Cultural  


Ford, Thembi. "Black First Family Sitcom to Star Jackee, Kellita White, John Witherspoon, Will  
You Watch?" Clutch  (2012).  http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2012/03/black-first-  
family-sitcom-to-star-jackee-kellita-white-john-will-watch/ [accessed  
September 11, 2012].

Frank, Claudia. "The Girl Who Breaks Down." In America's Next Top Model, 60 minutes. United  

________. "The Girl Who Marks Her Territory." In America's Next Top Model, 60 minutes.  

________. "The Girl Who Sticks Her Foot in Her Mouth." In America's Next Top Model, 60  

________. "The Girl Who Won't Stop Talking." In America's Next Top Model, 60 minutes.  


_______. "Ostroff on Growing up Fast." Broadcasting & Cable, February 1 2010, 12.


_______. "CW to Stream 'Top Model'." Broadcasting & Cable, March 5 2007, 25.

_______. "CW's '90210,' Early Launch: Omg." Broadcasting & Cable, October 13 2008, 2:23.

_______. "Relax, the Cavalry Is Here." Broadcasting & Cable, April 12 2010, 10.


Higgins, John M. "Cable's Conundrum." Broadcasting & Cable, August 28 2006, 3;12.


_______. "UPN Gets a Model Makeover." *Variety* 2004, 40
_______. "'Top Model' Still Stylin'." *Variety*, March 4 2005, 2;15.


_______. "What If at the End of This Season of Grey’s Anatomy, the Hospital Just Exploded into Flames and We Don’t Know Who Lives or Who Dies?" *Twitter* (2009). [http://www.twitter.com/#!/shondarhimes](http://www.twitter.com/#!/shondarhimes) [accessed March 9, 2009].


______. "Broadcast TV or Cable, It's All the Same to Consumers." *Advertising Age*, March 23 2009, 4;30.


______. "Cable Nets Broadening Their Appeal While Sharpening Their Positioning." *Advertising Age*, April 12 2010, 10.


"'The Steve Harvey Show' Still at the Top of the Class after Five Seasons." *Jet*, February 12 2001, 60-64.


Thompson, Mary. "‘Learn Something from This!’ the Problem of Optinal Ethnicity on America’s Next Top Model" Feminist Media Studies 10, no. 3 (2010): 335-352.


http://www.wga.org/uploadedFiles/who_we_are/HWR09.pdf [accessed May 19, 2010].


"Why TV's 'The Parkers' Remains a Hit with Black Viewers for a Second Season." Jet, October 23 2000, 60-64.


Yarbrough, Marti. "'One on One' Is #1 TV Show with Black Viewers." Jet, March 10 2003, 58-62.


